

EFFECTIVE AND MEANINGFUL COLLABORATION TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY  
HEALTH

By

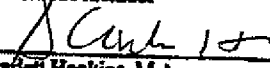
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EFFECTIVE AND MEANINGFUL COLLABORATION TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY  
HEALTH

A  
PROJECT

Presented to the Faculty  
Of the University of Alaska Fairbanks

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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Fairbanks, AK

December 2015



# EFFECTIVE AND MEANINGFUL COLLABORATION TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY HEALTH

## **Abstract**

This research project set out to identify those factors that are likely to lead to effective and meaningful collaboration among a broad range of stakeholders wishing to collaborate to improve health in rural communities. By studying two different collaborative efforts in rural Alaska that have succeeded in collaboration but have also faced many challenges, benefits of collaboration, challenges to collaboration, factors that contribute to benefits and challenges of collaboration, and important areas for development in collaboration were identified. Through the research study and a literature review conducted within the context of the researcher's professional experience, frameworks and tools were identified that can be used to help facilitate and support collaboration that is effective and meaningful in a community.



# **Effective and Meaningful Collaboration to Improve Community Health: A Resource Guide**

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## Executive Summary and Introduction

The need for collaboration in rural communities to address a wide array of health-related issues is great. A collaborative approach, when skillfully implemented, can help communities and the organizations that serve them to more effectively identify a broad range of health concerns in the community, identify community needs to address these concerns, and coordinate services and secure funding to address these needs. Nevertheless, knowing “*how*” to collaborate is a complex subject without simple answers. How collaboration is defined, how success is determined, and specific collaborative goals may vary widely among communities, yet there are many themes, tools, and approaches to collaboration that are likely to lead to more sustainable and positive outcomes. Communities typically face a similar set of challenges that naturally arise out of navigating the complex web of relationships and information necessitated by a collaborative problem-solving approach.

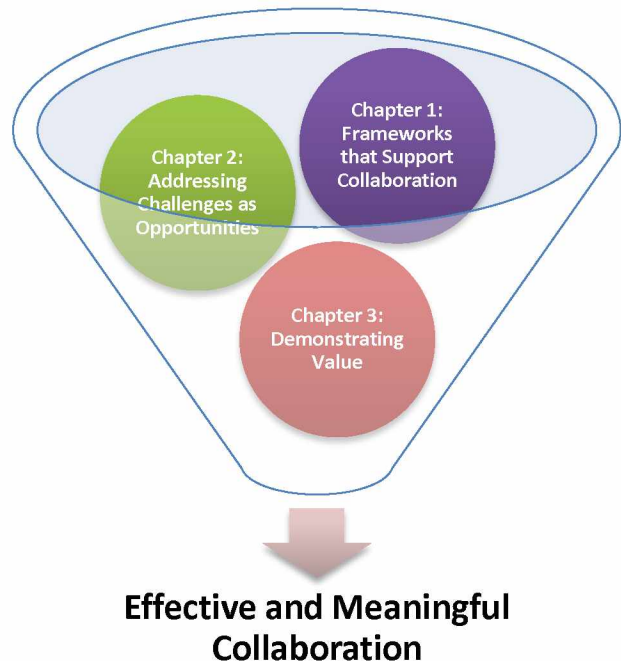
The purpose of this guide is to highlight themes and approaches to collaboration, as well as opportunities for skillfully addressing challenges, that are likely to lead to more positive outcomes. This guide is intended to support leaders and facilitators of collaborative efforts by serving as a tool for communities to develop a strong foundation for collaboration. Each leader will have his or her own unique set of relationships and circumstances to apply the themes of this guide to, adapting tools and models to fit the needs of the community and the collaborative partnership. The intent for this handbook is to be written in language that is easy to understand, to present tools that can be easily translated into a wide range of scenarios and community contexts, and to provide additional resources including information about how to implement these resources in real-life situations that are relevant to rural communities.

While the guide is directed towards those who facilitate collaboration, it can also be utilized by collaborative partners at the community level, especially in learning how to support their leaders, understanding approaches to collaboration, and constructively addressing any challenges that may arise during the course of collaboration. It can also be used by larger entities such as state agencies or other funders who wish to support collaborative approaches in a variety of contexts. Ultimately, this guide is intended to enhance the capacity of communities to collaborate in such a way that it is meaningful to the community and effective in achieving community goals.

The information contained within this guide is a compilation of literature review, research of existing collaborative efforts, and the author’s professional experience facilitating collaboration in the healthcare environment. A complete list of references is included at the end of this guide.

The guide is divided into three chapters: Frameworks that Support Collaboration, Addressing Challenges as Opportunities, and Demonstrating Value.

In Chapter 1: *Frameworks that Support Effective Collaboration*, six frameworks that can be used in various combinations to support effective collaboration are explored. These frameworks are 1) Community-Based Participatory Research, 2) Indigenous Knowledge Systems, 3) Collective Impact, 4) Partner Readiness to Collaborate, 5) Community Readiness, and 6) Wise Practices. Each of these frameworks is valuable on its own. However, they also build upon each other and work to strengthen each other when used together. Components of these frameworks can be combined in any number of ways to support collaboration in differing contexts and environments. At the end of each section is a description of references related to that topic for those seeking additional information.



In Chapter 2: *Addressing Challenges as Opportunities*, common challenges that nearly all collaborations face to varying degrees and at varying points in time, are introduced. These are: 1) leadership and succession planning, 2) expectations, 3) power struggles and infighting, 4) changing goals and agendas, 5) competing agendas, 6) changing coalition membership and participation, 7) internal board functioning, 8) funding and financial commitment, 9) demonstration of value, 10) thinking style and personality differences, 11) partner fatigue, and 12) meeting structure and attendance. While challenges are often feared or avoided, when they are instead viewed as opportunities to improve working relationships and for partners to learn and grow together, challenges become important vehicles for strengthening collaborative outcomes. With each challenge, opportunities and suggestions for ways to proactively address these challenges are also presented.

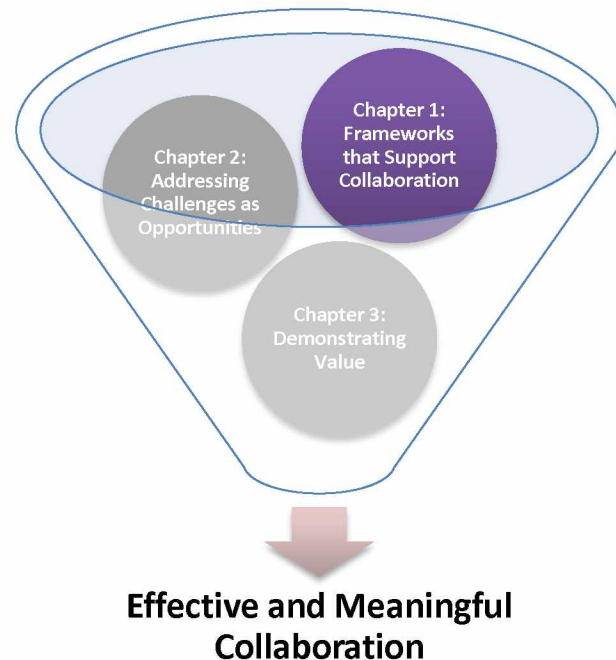
In Chapter 3: *Demonstrating Value*, the critical but often elusive task of how to measure value in collaboration is explored. Demonstrating value is crucial to maintaining partner and stakeholder engagement, and to achieving intended collaborative outcomes. Collaborative partners must be able to find value from participation for themselves, for their organizations,

and for the community. In this section sample tools and strategies are shared. At the end of this chapter is a sample survey that can be used to assess partnership progress and value in the collaboration.

Finally, it should be noted that while this guide is intended to support those facilitating collaboration, facilitating *effective and meaningful* collaboration is not something that can be learned only through reading. Rather, it must be experientially learned. Due to the complexities of facilitating collaboration in an effective and meaningful manner, leaders who are new to facilitating collaborative models may find great value in seeking mentors to support them in the process. The best approaches to collaboration are dependent on a great number of factors, including the community, the issue being addressed, and the relationships of the partners.

## Chapter 1: Frameworks that Support Effective Collaboration

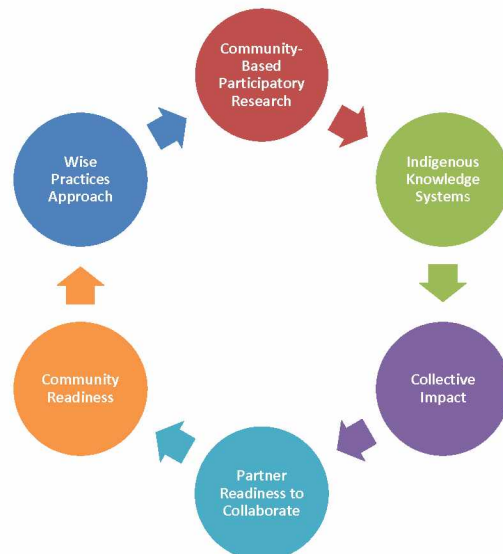
Collaborative efforts can become challenged in numerous ways, especially as groups are faced with a variety of changing contexts, issues, and growth. There are, however, several frameworks that can be utilized alone or in combination with each other that provide a scaffold of understanding and infrastructure to support the development of effective and meaningful collaborative efforts within a community.



## Six Frameworks that Support Collaboration

Six frameworks that are useful to supporting collaborative efforts are discussed in this chapter. The following frameworks build upon each other to support successful collaboration:

- Community-Based Participatory Research
- Indigenous Knowledge Systems
- Collective Impact
- Partner Readiness to Collaborate
- Community Readiness
- Wise Practices Approach

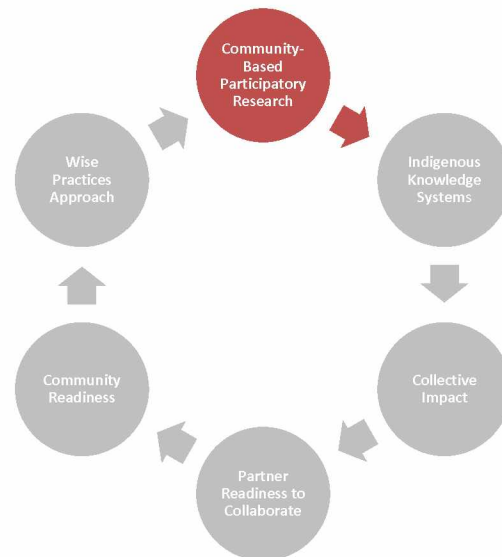




## Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)

Community-based participatory research, commonly referred to as CBPR, is a philosophy that is helpful to carry with us as we work to collaborate in communities.

Research can be defined in many ways. Most commonly in collaborative projects or efforts, it appears in the form of needs assessment, or identifying needs in the community. This can be a general form of needs assessment to identify what the current needs are in a community, or a more detailed form of needs assessment that is specific to a certain area of need already identified in the community.



A community-based participatory philosophy can be applied to community development efforts in order to build effective collaboration between funders, collaborative partners, collaborative leaders, and the community. A fundamental tenet of CBPR is that research is conducted together with a community, rather than on a community. CBPR is rooted in relationships, with the community playing a lead role in every step of the research, from selection of the research topic and assessment of community needs, to implementation of strategies, evaluation, and the dissemination of research results. This type of approach pays off in the long run by ensuring goals, methods and outcomes are meaningful and useful to a community. It is a philosophy where the research (or assessment) is only one stage in a process intended to increase the capacity of communities to be proactive in assessing community issues and developing solutions, leading to long-term sustainability and viability of communities.

## Key Elements and Benefits of Utilizing a Community-Based Participatory Approach to Collaboration

Rural communities especially are familiar with a helicopter approach to community development and research, with outsiders to the community (such as researchers, funders, or consultants) gathering information from a community to serve their own plans for development, or even their own interests, rather than the community's interests. This approach typically has little if any benefit to the community, particularly in the long run. Without the community as an equal partner in the process, these outsiders are often oblivious to the needs, wishes and culture of the community.

In contrast, CBPR is conducted in partnership and in coordination with the community, offering a respectful and collaborative approach where the community is an active and equal partner in all aspects of the research, assessment, or project from start to finish. While CBPR may initially be more expensive and time-consuming due to the complexities of collaboration and coordination with diverse groups and stakeholders, the long-term benefits far outweigh the costs and time commitment that are required up-front. The approach empowers communities by increasing their capacity to analyze and resolve problems in a way that is more likely to be sustainable and lead to long-term viability of communities.

CBPR is rooted in the development of relationships with communities that are flexible and involve bi-directional and mutual learning on the part of the researcher, funder or consultant, as well as the community. CBPR is an approach where one does not enter a community with pre-formed ideas to prove or disprove, but rather where information collected through the process itself is used to generate theories and ideas for interventions in the community. A CBPR approach allows for the design of interventions that meet the specific needs and contexts of a community, leading to more meaningful, useful, and locally based outcomes, enlisting local community members in the process, and building increased community capacity to conduct research in the future.

A CBPR approach is flexible and varies within the context of each community and particular project. ***There is no “one size fits all” approach; however, there are certain themes or elements that should be present in any CBPR process.*** These themes are described below.

### **Collaboration with the Community Creates an Emphasis on Local Needs and Priorities**

In CBPR, the community is considered an equal partner, playing a major role in all phases of the process from selection of the research or community development idea, to dissemination of the results. In this CBPR approach:

- The project is driven by the needs and interests of the community.
- Permission is sought from the community before starting the project.
- The community is involved in planning the methodology and timeline for the project.
- The community participates in gathering data to support the project, evaluation of the project and process, and dissemination of information about the project, process, and outcomes.
- The researcher, consultant or funder works with the community as a facilitator and guide, providing expertise to community leaders in the research or assessment, but

ultimately ensuring it is directed by the community and can be applied to real and meaningful issues identified by community members.

Community members may contribute at different levels of effort throughout different phases of the project based on varying levels of interest; however, ***the critical principle is that the community is viewed as an equal partner, engaged, and invited to participate and provide feedback in every step of the process.***

### **A Community-Based Participatory Approach has Immediate and Relevant Application in the Community**

By addressing issues that the community currently feels are important, as opposed to being driven by the interests of just one or a few people or organizations, outcomes are more likely to be relevant, meaningful and long-lasting in the community. Projects based in a philosophy of CBPR:

- Relate to immediate, practical issues in a community.
- Are contextual to the community, with results that are immediately useful to solving relevant problems.
- Have a project-based focus, with needs and players that may change from one project to the next.
- Include the community in every step of the process so that outcomes of the research are not only owned by the community, but also have relevance to the community.

### **Building Community Capacity with a Focus on Community Strengths Helps Mitigate Power Imbalances**

Power imbalances are common between rural communities and funders, researchers, and/or governmental agencies due to a variety of factors including level of familiarity and skill in dealing with bureaucratic systems. By partnering with the community and including them in every step of the process, an approach that utilizes CBPR builds the ability of communities to conduct research or assessment, as well as interpret and apply these results to solve real issues in the community. A community-based participatory approach to projects and assessments ultimately helps build the capacity of the community to conduct future projects in the following ways:

- Increasing the community's capacity to conduct assessment while focusing on the strengths of the community works towards lessening power imbalances.



- By actively participating in the process the community gains more knowledge, leading to an increased ability of the community to take effective action and direct its own outcomes.
- A strengths-based approach to assessment that focuses on community culture and resources builds up a community and increases its capacity to solve its own problems. This is in sharp contrast to a more traditional approach to assessment that focuses on identifying deficits in the community and outside resources to solve problems.
- Providing local community members with training on research methods such as interviewing, data collection and management, and evaluation ***builds community capacity***. Over time the community will develop more skills and be able to play a more significant role in solving problems through the experience gained.

### Time Invested Up-Front has Long-Term Benefit

When done properly, a CBPR approach to assessment and planning may be very time-intensive due to the nature of collaborative relationships and the complexities of working with numerous groups and stakeholders. Because the community is included in every phase of the process, there are extra steps required at various points to seek community input and feedback. However, time invested up front pays back enormously in dividends.

- ***While extensive inclusion of the community may initially appear to be unrealistic, too time-consuming, or even frustrating, it ultimately means the community will feel a sense of ownership over the project, and the outcomes of the project will be more useful and relevant to the community.*** Furthermore, the community will be more likely to take on similar projects in the future for its own benefit.

### A Focus on Building and Strengthening Relationships in the Community Supports Long-Term Project Success

- A strong network of local supporters built at the outset of the project ensures that local backing and expertise are in place to support the project throughout its life.
- The dissemination of project information and results is more successful and relevant to the community when local needs and priorities are taken into account – this can only occur when strong relationships are developed with community members to support dissemination efforts.

- By creating channels for community members to provide feedback and modifications to improve project efforts, these relationships with the community will ensure that over time the project will continue to benefit all partners in the effort.

### Flexibility and an Open Mind Lead to Mutual Learning

When utilizing a CBPR approach to collaboration, all partners as well as their facilitators or leaders, community stakeholders, and funders must view themselves as learners as well as observers. This leads to a sense of mutual learning, reducing power imbalances and increasing the knowledge of all parties that are involved in the project.

- ***Roles are not fixed or concrete, and should not be thought of in isolation from each other. Rather, roles are fluid and constantly in motion, and community members as well as project partners, leaders and funders must all act as both teacher and student, taking turns to educate each other.***
- The design of the project and the relationships of project partners must be allowed to evolve over the course of the project, as more knowledge is gained, and as community needs shift.
- Effective collaboration includes learning that leaves room for error, allowing space and flexibility to adjust priorities or approach as more knowledge and understanding is gained by collaborating partners about the community, community needs, or the issue being addressed.

### Regular Dissemination of Project Information and Results Keeps the Community Engaged

It is critical to the success of any community-based project that the community is kept informed of the project's existence, project process and progress, and project outcomes. Dissemination of information to the community should occur through multiple channels and avenues, so that a broad cross-section of the community can be reached.

- By having community members play an active role in the dissemination of project information, the project will reach a broader spectrum of the community, and in more ways that members of the community are able to access.
- Having community members participate in the dissemination of project information facilitates greater community involvement, long-term engagement, and community ownership in the project.

### Effective Collaboration Using a Community-based Participatory Approach is Iterative and Requires Long-term Commitment

- Effective collaboration is an ongoing, cyclical process rather than a linear one with a defined beginning and endpoint, requiring a long-term commitment from all partners to create lasting community change.
- ***Effective collaboration is an iterative process that must be allowed to evolve and adjust as the needs of the community change and power balances shift.*** It requires a sense of flexibility from all partners towards methodology and approach as the collective knowledge base is expanded.

#### In Summary

The flexibility required by CBPR not only builds on existing strengths and resources of a community, but also works to meet the evolving needs of a community, allowing contextual components to be included in the collaborative effort. This supports the community in maintaining a higher level of engagement, and improving the collaborative design over time. By being both students and teachers, all collaborative partners have the opportunity to broaden their own knowledge base and develop stronger relationships with the community to facilitate better outcomes and long-term sustainability of collaborative efforts.

#### References: Want to Learn More about CBPR?

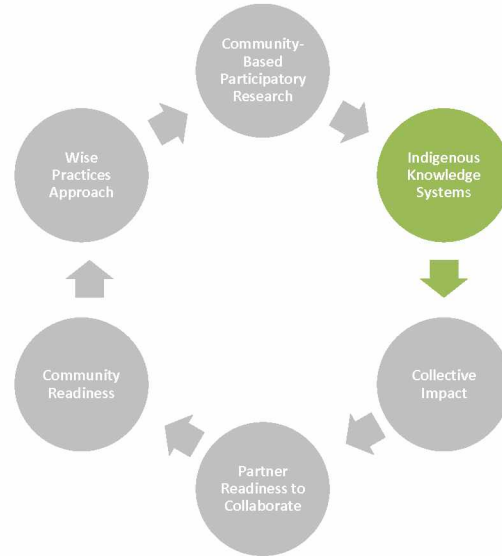
- Randy Stoecker's (2013) book *Research Methods for Community Change: A Project-Based Approach* offers an easy to read and understand description of why community-based research (CBR) is important, fundamental elements of CBR, how it benefits communities, and common challenges and practical solutions to these challenges based on extensive community development experience.
- *Developing and Sustaining Community-Based Participatory Research Partnerships: A Skill-Building Curriculum* by Community-Campus Partnerships for Health is an excellent and comprehensive resource that includes valuable information about forming partnerships, trust and communication, obtaining funding, disseminating results, and planning for sustainability. This resource can be downloaded for free from the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health website at <https://ccph.memberclicks.net/cbprcurriculum>.

- The Center for Alaska Native Health Research (CANHR) at the University of Alaska Fairbanks utilizes a research model based on CBPR in its work with Alaska Native communities, organizations and individuals. CANHR faculty and staff work collaboratively with tribal groups and health care agencies to develop research questions, methodologies and procedures, as well as to interpret and apply data in various contexts to promote health and wellness. The CANHR website has a wealth of information and examples of how CBPR can be applied to effectively collaborate to improve community health. <http://www.uaf.edu/canhr/>



## Indigenous Knowledge Systems

The approach we take to acquiring knowledge is just as important, and in many cases when working to build effective collaboration, even more important, than the knowledge that is gained itself. It is not the “*what*” but rather the “*how*” that matters. It is *how* we acquire the knowledge and *how* we go about building relationships that will lead to long-lasting, sustainable, and meaningful collaborative efforts that are built on trusting and respectful relationships in the community.



### Some questions to consider in building a collaborative foundation:

1. How will relationships within the community and among collaborative partners be taken into account and respected in the course of collaboration?
2. What approaches to the development and retention of knowledge will be utilized?
3. Do the approaches to collaboration focus on the issue in isolation from influencing factors in the community, or do the methods take into account the full breadth of relational contexts that surround the issue?

The three questions above represent basic elements of indigenous knowledge systems that are vital in creating effective collaboration in any community, whether the community includes indigenous populations or not. All partners must feel equally respected in the knowledge and relationships they bring to the table, and the methods employed in collaboration must be culturally appropriate to the context of the community and factors surrounding the issue that partners have come together to address. If this is not the case, then no matter how genuine or well-intentioned the collaborative effort is, it becomes vulnerable to failure due to loss of credibility with collaborative partners as well as diminished community support for the effort altogether.

Successful collaboration arises out of respect and trust that is built between collaborating partners. The use of indigenous knowledge systems to complement and inform western knowledge traditions offers an approach that increases the likelihood of collaborative success through development of respectful and lasting relationships that are built within important



relational contexts necessary to fully understand the issue. These relationships must also include critical elements of reciprocity and co-learning.

The use of indigenous and traditional approaches to knowledge development can be beneficial to any community regardless of racial composition. Where western approaches to issues in healthcare tend towards a narrow focus and categorization of issues out of context, the addition of indigenous approaches to knowledge acquisition can help us better understand issues by including the contextual factors and relationships that surround the various aspects of health and healthcare, leading to more appropriate and relevant solutions for a community.

## Relationships and Context

Indigenous and traditional knowledge systems emphasize the role of relationships in the acquisition of knowledge, including relationships with people as well as with ideas and the environment. Knowledge is seen as context-dependent – that is, dependent on the relationships that contributed to the development of that knowledge. Each person has a unique and complex web of relationships with their family, friends and community that is an important element of their personal identity, and therefore impacts their approach to collaboration, their relationships with other collaborative partners in a room, and their relationship with the issue the partners are working to resolve.

Some key elements of indigenous knowledge systems that support the building of trusting relationships as a foundation for effective collaboration are summarized below:

- When developing knowledge in a collaborative environment, we must take into account that ideas brought forth by partners were formed in the context of their own relationships, experiences, history, environment, and worldview.
- Indigenous knowledge systems focus on relational accountability; that is, accountability to the relationships in our lives that have contributed to our work and ideas. These ideas and knowledge arise from the accumulation and interpretation of experiences and relationships over time.
- When working in a collaborative context, we must be careful to review rather than critique the ideas of our collaborative partners. Criticizing another's ideas is unfair because we cannot claim to know more about the relationships and contexts that contributed to forming that person's ideas than they do. It carries a disrespectful presumption that we know more than other people about how their own ideas came to be.
- Rather than debate and decide which approach or solution is better than another, we must hear all perspectives equally and respect the process and relationships that

contributed to each perspective. Instead of hearing another's ideas and responding with "but..." we can hear another's ideas and respond with "and..." thereby building upon knowledge while respecting rather than discrediting or negating the knowledge that person is contributing to the effort. This is a system of knowledge development that builds upon the relationships and experiences of collaborating partners, increasing trust between partners as they learn that their own knowledge and relationships will be respected and contribute to the larger body of knowledge. Knowledge is built through the accumulation of ideas and through the relationships between ideas and the people in the room.

- When collaborating, it is important to form relationships with the other collaborating partners as individuals. Indigenous and traditional knowledge systems find meaning in where a person comes from and who their ancestors are due to relational accountability and the role of contexts and relationships in knowledge development. When developing collaborative relationships, more context and meaning is added to the discussion when we allow ourselves to understand a person's background and relationships to the issue being addressed. This places new knowledge that is shared into the proper context. It also helps build increased respect and trust among partners, as a better understanding is developed of the experiences and relationships that contributed to a person's ideas and perceptions.

### Understanding Worldview in Collaboration

Worldview is how a person understands phenomena and what they perceive to be true, as seen through their own experiences and belief system. Worldviews encompass how a person understands their role in the world and the nature of existence itself. In collaborative environments, we must always keep in mind that the worldviews of others differ from our own. It is critical to maintain a sense of humility and respect in order to understand the worldviews of others, which is *crucial to* understanding their perspectives on the issues being addressed.

Failing to consider differing worldviews, and falsely assuming one's own worldview is the only reality, or the only "*correct*" reality, can severely limit our ability to understand another's motivations, needs, perspectives, and approaches to dealing with problems and challenges, preventing a level of collaboration that extends beyond the superficial, or jeopardizing collaboration entirely. The facilitators of collaborative efforts, and the collaborating partners themselves, must constantly strive to understand partner motivations from a relative and open-minded standpoint, with the patience and curiosity necessary to achieve respect and gain genuine understanding.

## Cyclical Approach to Knowledge Development: Challenges of the Logic Model

Western approaches towards community development have historically tended to be very linear in nature, progressively working through a series of action steps intended to lead towards an end goal with measurable outcomes. The logic model, used in nearly all community development efforts today, is a classic example of this linear type of process and is more often than not a requirement of funders and organizations. While logic models are excellent tools for guiding efforts, offering a map of how a group plans to get from point A to point B, they do not accurately reflect the cyclical way that knowledge is typically developed. It is important to remember the logic model is a tool for communication with funders and constituents – but it does not tell the whole story.

This disconnect is often where communities attempting to collaborate run into roadblocks, especially when faced with pressures from their funders or organizations to focus on the logic model. A disproportionate emphasis on the logic model makes it easy to forget that ***it is the relationships formed and the approach to knowledge development that make the collaboration effective - the logic model and the ability to follow it are in reality only an output of that collaboration.*** Some important points to remember in facilitating collaborative partnerships are:

- While action steps and carefully laid out plans defining how outcomes will be achieved are critical in any community development or collaborative endeavor, *how* a community functions and *how* relationships evolve in actuality is much more complex and circuitous. Approaches, project materials, and project evaluation must address not just outcomes but also processes.
- Not only may unanticipated circumstances arise that require flexibility in plans, but as more knowledge is gained by the collective group, and relationships are formed and strengthened, relationships and contexts that collaborative partners have to that knowledge may change as well.
- Requirements to describe concepts and program plans in linear, written form can remove the context and the relationships in which the ideas were formed – a rich and necessary component of the program plans themselves. This can be mitigated by including a description of the process of knowledge development as well as community context as a supplement to the logic model and/or strategic planning process. This can include separate goals for how the collaboration will continue to grow and learn together as more knowledge is gained.
- Attentiveness towards the circular nature of knowledge accumulation in community development, and acknowledgement that this is a continual, iterative, complex, and



ongoing process, can lead to collaborative efforts that are more relevant to the community, more accurately reflect current circumstances in the community, and are thus long-lasting in the community.

- All elements of the collaborative effort have a relationship to the whole, and because of the relationship between each part, no element can be fully understood when standing alone. Therefore, each part plays an equally important role that should be taken into account in order for collaborative success to occur.

### Fluctuating Roles, Reciprocity and Co-Learning

There is constant fluidity in the roles we play within collaborative efforts, and it is critical to maintain an awareness of what role we are playing in any given situation, what our relationship is to the issue, the project, and the other members of the collaboration, and how these varying and changing roles may affect our priorities and perceptions. Especially in rural communities, collaborating partners, as well as their leaders, may take on the role of a community member, facilitator or both at different times in the process, depending on the context of the current situation or discussion.

When all collaborating partners are willing to enter a space where they admit that they do not individually know all of the answers, partners are then able to learn together and work collaboratively to develop creative solutions for the community. Arriving at this higher place of understanding also brings with it the potential to ultimately strengthen relationships.

- When partners are authentically willing to explore their own gaps in knowledge and expand upon their thinking, positive collaboration can occur. If partners are not willing to look beyond their own views and explore different ways of knowing with the other partners, that's when collaboration becomes much more difficult.
- Acknowledgement of differences is crucial to successful collaboration. Successful collaboration is rooted in our mutual knowledge of the ***need to learn from each other through the experience of discussion that is embedded in context, rather than just the learning of facts.***
- Successful collaboration is highly dependent on our ability to navigate our different roles, in different contexts, and recognize how the various roles we play can impact our work.
- A sense of reciprocity and co-learning, with bi-directional learning and sharing of knowledge, is crucial to successful collaboration. All partners in a collaborative effort must be willing to exercise humility and be learners as well, exploring both knowledge and ways of knowing that are outside of their known contexts.

- The dissemination of information must also be bi-directional. Typically, the community provides information to the collaborative partners in the form of completed surveys or assessments, but the collaborating partners must also provide information back to the community in return. Similarly, dialogue must also be bi-directional, with both the community and the collaborative partners learning from each other.

### In Summary

Through the use of methods and practices that employ reciprocity and co-learning, partnerships will not only gain credibility in a community as they work to resolve healthcare issues, but interventions developed will be more relevant to the community and have a higher probability of succeeding. Mindfulness to the circular (rather than linear) nature of knowledge development will provide flexibility in collaborative approaches as more knowledge is gained and relationships evolve. Finally, accountability and respects towards the relationships that bring partners to the table will not only strengthen the partnerships immediately, but will build stronger and more trusting relationships to serve as a foundation for future collaboration.

### References: Want to Learn More About Indigenous Knowledge Systems?

- The book *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* by Shawn Wilson (2008) is a short read and provides the reader with a better understanding of relationships in indigenous knowledge systems, and how these relationships affect research and collaborative partnerships. In an applied setting, this book provides those leading or facilitating collaborative efforts with a better understanding of how they might facilitate the development of relationships among collaborative partners to achieve more effective collaboration.
- The article *Preserving a Space for Cross-cultural Collaborations: An Account of Insider/Outsider Issues* by Joan Parker Webster and Theresa Arevgaq John (Ethnography and Education, 2010) provides an excellent description of insider and outsider roles in research and community development, and some of the challenges that can be encountered with fluctuating roles. This article also provides useful perspectives on the concepts of reciprocity and co-learning.

## The Collective Impact Model

Just as problems in the community result from a complex interplay of many contributors and groups, addressing these problems requires an equally complex web of partnerships to develop effective solutions. Collective Impact refers to the commitment of a wide range of stakeholders in the community to collectively work together to develop solutions for problems in the community, based on a common agenda of all partners.



The Collective Impact Model is a structured approach to collaboration that includes a centralized infrastructure with dedicated staff to facilitate the collaborative effort, the development of common goals and measures to evaluate the collaborative effort and its outcomes, continuous communication between partners and the community, and activities that are intended to benefit all partners in the collaboration (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

- Collective Impact is based on the premise that no one organization is responsible for any social problem, but rather these issues are the result of a complex interplay between multiple groups including government, business, and social sector organizations. Because of this interplay, a coalition representing all of these sectors across a community is also required to solve the problems (Kania & Kramer, 2011).
- By bringing multiple groups in the community together to develop a shared understanding of the problem and a common agenda to work towards solutions for the problem, solutions that could not be thought of independently by any one organization are more likely to emerge, and creative, collaborative approaches that meet the needs of multiple organizations are developed.
- When utilizing the Collective Impact Model, participating organizations simultaneously adopt the solutions that are co-developed, leading to greater alignment of efforts in the community, and thus leading to increased and more immediate success in the community. (Kania & Kramer, 2013).



## Time Pays Back in Long-Term Benefit

A commitment to this more structured process is time consuming, and having dedicated staff to facilitate collaborative efforts can be more financially costly than traditional approaches to collaboration. However, when facilitated well, the benefits of the Collective Impact Model far outweigh the costs in the following ways:

- Communication is improved among partners and partnerships are strengthened.
- Efforts are more likely to become sustainable in the long-term.
- The model and infrastructure that are developed can be applied to a wide array of community development efforts.
- The development of shared measures across organizations serving the community allows for ongoing community-based evaluation rather than evaluation specific to each organization, supporting more effective monitoring of community conditions.
- Community capacity, important to building long-term sustainability, is built at a high level through close monitoring of coalition functioning, with a structured process in place to support partners in mutual learning and problem-solving.

## Five Conditions of Success for Collective Impact

In researching successful Collective Impact initiatives, Kania & Kramer (2011) concluded that five conditions must be present for a Collective Impact initiative to be successful and long-lasting in a community. These five conditions are a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a backbone support organization. The presence of these five conditions leads to a higher likelihood of meaningful and effective outcomes in a community, resulting from better alignment among collaborative partners. The five conditions are described in further detail in the following table.

<b>Five Conditions of Success</b> <i>(Kania &amp; Kramer, 2011)</i>	<b>What They Mean</b>
<b>Common Agenda</b>	Collaborative partners have a similar understanding of the problem, share the same goals for the collaboration, and have a shared vision for change.
<b>Shared Measurement Systems</b>	Consistent measures taken across the community demonstrate value and success in the collaboration and help partners learn from each other, ensure their efforts are aligned, and hold each other accountable.
<b>Mutually Reinforcing Activities</b>	Each partner undertakes activities in areas they excel at. These activities support the larger collaborative goal and also reinforce the work of the other partners.
<b>Continuous Communication</b>	Regular meetings and communication between meetings support partners in building trust, reaching a common agenda, and co-learning and problem solving together.
<b>Backbone Support Organization</b>	Provides leadership and dedicated staff to facilitate, manage and monitor collaborative efforts including focusing partner attention, logistical and administrative support, planning and management of activities, and collection and reporting of data.

## Key Elements of Each of the Five Conditions of Success

### Common Agenda

- Partners in the collaborative effort have a shared vision for change.
- The partners do not necessarily have to agree on all of the factors and nuances that contribute to the problem, but they do need to share a common understanding of the problem itself.
- Partners need to be in mutual agreement of the primary goals of the collaboration, as well as a joint approach to addressing the problem.

### Shared Measurement Systems

- A shared measurement system refers to how success will be measured and reported, and helps partners know whether their collaborative efforts are effective.
- Most often, individual organizations each have their own measurement system in place that is based on organizational goals and outcomes. However, a shared measurement system means that consistent evaluative measures are being taken regularly across a



community, helping collaborative partners learn from each other, as well as hold each other accountable for working towards shared goals.

- ***Shared measurement systems do not need to be lengthy or complex.*** In fact, a short list of measurement indicators that are most meaningful in ensuring all partners are aligned and reaching overall goals can be extremely effective.

### Mutually Reinforcing Activities

- Partners in a collaborative relationship will all excel at different tasks and in different ways.
- The concept of mutually reinforcing activities emphasizes that not all partners need to be doing the same thing (and in fact they should not). In Collective Impact, each partner undertakes a series of actions that supports the larger shared goal, reinforces the work of other partners, and is coordinated with the activities of other partners.
- In this way, each partner in the collaborative effort is able to continue doing what they do best, but in a way that supports the other partners as well as the overall shared goal for the community.

### Continuous Communication

- Trusting relationships in a collaborative partnership take time and effort to develop; often a period of years is required. The role of continuous communication in this process cannot be overemphasized.
- As time progresses and consistent communication develops, partner relationships will be strengthened by co-learning and problem-solving together.
- As partners begin to see the strength in their shared knowledge and passion about the issue through ongoing communication and co-learning, they will become more ready to let go of their individual agendas and work towards the shared agenda that has been developed.
- Regularly timed meetings between ***executive level leaders who have decision-making authority***, and that use a structured agenda and a facilitator, are essential to keep communication flowing.
- Communications between meetings through the use of email and social media tools can help continue the process of relationship building between face-to-face interactions.

- A key to maintaining continuous communication and building necessary relationships is to ensure that meetings are consistently scheduled and are not cancelled, and that ***all partners agree to attend meetings rather than send alternates in their place.***

### Backbone Support Organization

- Very often there is an expectation that collaboration not only can, but should occur without a supportive infrastructure in place, including a designated staff person responsible for facilitating the collaborative effort. While all participants most likely are genuine in their desire to collaborate and support the goals of the collaboration, the reality is that coordination and management of collaborative efforts takes a great deal of time, which collaborating partners typically do not have.
- The Collective Impact Model utilizes a backbone support organization that has a staff person with a very specific set of skills to support the collaborative initiative.
- Although the backbone support organization may often consist of just one staff person, this person has the capacity to facilitate, manage, and monitor collaborative efforts, including handling the many logistical and administrative details of collaboration, providing communications support, planning and management of projects or initiatives, and collection and reporting of data. Kania and Kramer (2011) identify the three primary roles of the backbone organization as project manager, data manager and facilitator.

### Equity in Collective Impact

Kania & Kramer (2015) have found that in order to create lasting change in a community, the principle of equity must be integrated into Collective Impact efforts. While achieving equity can be incredibly complex and challenging, and must originate within the individual organizations in order to extend into collaborative efforts, equity is crucial to facilitating sustainable change in community.

Equity should be examined in the context of policies or practices that may reinforce power imbalances within the community. Strategies can be developed that consider the advantages and disadvantages experienced by different populations within the community. Perhaps most importantly, those people in the community who are most affected by the problem being collaboratively addressed should be invited to participate in the collaborative process.

Some key points to consider in addressing equity within the Collective Impact Model are:

- Equity does not happen on its own. Even with the best of intentions, achieving equity requires hard work and commitment.
- ***Collaborating partners must begin by addressing equity within their own organizations in order to successfully achieve equity as a community.***
- As a collaborative group, it is important to mutually define what equity means, so that in working to achieve equity, all partners are operating under the same principles and share a common language.
- While achieving equity may seem like an insurmountable challenge, ***the important actions are to begin addressing it and to facilitate ongoing conversation.***

### In Summary

While relatively new, the Collective Impact Model appears to be an effective framework for creating lasting and meaningful collaborative initiatives in a community. This model is based on the premise that because social problems are complex and result from numerous factors and players in the community, solving these problems requires a broad range of stakeholders in the community to collectively develop solutions by learning and working creatively together. Five conditions that are important for successful collaboration using this model are a common agenda, shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a backbone support organization. Addressing equity as part of the collaborative process is essential to successfully achieve long-term outcomes.

### References: Want to Learn More about Collective Impact?

- The article, *Collective Impact*, by John Kania and Mark Kramer (Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2011) provides an excellent overview of the Collective Impact Model, the rationale behind the model and why it is important, as well as the five conditions for success.
- The article, *Embracing Emergence: How Collective Impact Addresses Complexity*, by John Kania and Mark Kramer (Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2013) delves further into the model of Collective Impact with examples of how this model has been used in communities, and the positive impacts of this model in community development efforts.

- The article, *The Equity Imperative in Collective Impact*, by John Kania and Mark Kramer (Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2015) discusses the issue of equity in Collective Impact efforts and provides examples of how this important concept impacts collaboration.
- The Collective Impact Forum offers a wealth of resource for those wishing to utilize the Collective Impact model including webinars, articles, and other practical tips and tools. These resources can be downloaded from the website by creating a free account.  
(<http://collectiveimpactforum.org/>)

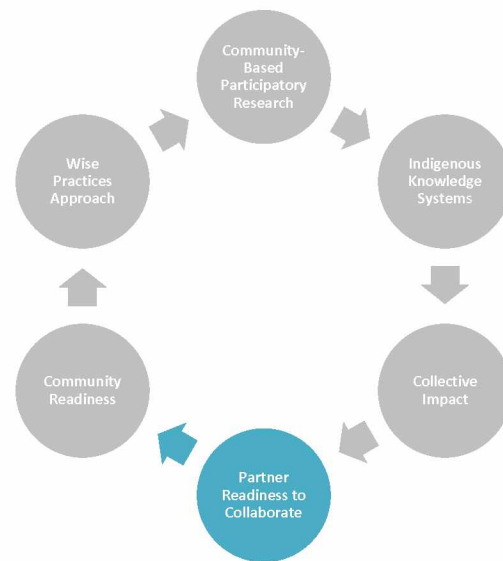


## Partner Readiness to Collaborate

When examining a community-based process, partnership can be viewed as both a facilitator and an outcome of that process. However, often in our quest to work together to develop solutions for a community, we forget to take a step back and ask:

*“Are we ready to work together?”*

*“Are there elements of our partnership that we need to improve upon in order to work well together?”*



Readiness is a fundamental precursor to collaboration, and in order for collaborative partnerships to be meaningful and effective, all partners must be equally ready to engage on numerous levels.

- If the collaborative partners are coming together for the first time, or if they are coming together to address an issue they have not already worked together to address, efforts first need to focus on bringing partners to a mutual stage of readiness to collaborate so that efforts will be effective, meaningful to all partners, and lead to continued interest in long-term collaboration.
- An initial evaluation of partnership readiness can be instrumental in the development of successful collaborative efforts that produce lasting and meaningful outcomes.
- In addition, monitoring levels of partner readiness over time can help to proactively identify potential problems early on, reducing vulnerability of the partnership and instead ensuring stability of relationships and an interest in lasting collaboration.

Andrews et al. (2010) evaluated major elements of partnership readiness to conduct community-based participatory research. Three dimensions of partner readiness to collaborate were identified that work together to support sustainability of the partnership and product, mutual growth of the partners, and long-term social and health impact for the community. These three dimensions of partner readiness are

1. Goodness of fit,
2. Capacity, and
3. Operations.

By ensuring that partners are equally ready to work together in each of these three dimensions, and monitoring levels of readiness over time so that potential problems can proactively be addressed, collaborative efforts are more likely to be not only successful, but sustainable in the long-term. Each of the three dimensions of partner readiness is described in more detail below.

## Goodness of Fit

Goodness of fit refers to the compatibility and suitability of the collaborating partners for the proposed project. It asks the questions, “Are we a good fit with each other to address this issue?” and “Are there issues surrounding our values, goals, or commitment that we need to discuss and come to agreement on before we work together to address the problem in the community?”

Goodness of fit is a critical building block of the partnership, as it ensures that the partners share similar values in addressing the issue, that partners share similar attitudes and beliefs in addressing the issue, that the partners will all gain benefit by addressing the issue, and that partners share an equal level of commitment to addressing the issue. ***The more compatible and aligned partners are, or the greater the goodness of fit, the more likely a partnership is to succeed.***

There are four key indicators for goodness of fit, and these are summarized in the table below:

Four Indicators of Goodness of Fit and What They Mean (Andrews et al., 2010)	
<b>Shared Values</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The partners share common values and principles in addressing the issue</li> </ul>
<b>Compatible Climate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The partners share similar attitudes and beliefs about the issue</li> <li>• The partners share similar social and political contexts</li> <li>• There is acknowledgement and resolution of past historical conflicts among partners</li> </ul>
<b>Mutual Benefit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partners have had transparent discussion about benefit/value of the collaboration to each partner and their organization</li> <li>• Partners have had transparent discussion about benefit/value of the project to the community</li> </ul>
<b>Commitment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partners share an equal level of commitment and flexibility to the process, including organizational commitment of time and resources</li> </ul>

## Capacity

Capacity means the level of ability and capability of the partners, their respective organizations, and the community to carry out a process that leads to sustainable impact. Elements of capacity are important to assess because they ensure that the partners collectively have the leadership, membership, resources and skills that are needed to address the issue. In considering leadership, ***it is important to make the distinction between leadership and management.*** While leadership and management go hand in hand, there is an important distinction between the two. Management is primarily focused on organization, planning, and coordination, whereas leadership includes the added elements of motivation, innovation, and vision.

There are four key indicators of capacity, and these are summarized in the table below:

Four Indicators of Capacity (Andrews, et al., 2010)	
<b>Effective Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The partners have leadership experience and skills among them such as respect, trust, credibility, effective communication, cooperation, and vision</li> </ul>
<b>Inclusive Membership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The influential community members and organizations that are needed to carry out the project are part of the partnership</li> <li>The community members and organizations that are necessary to create sustainability are part of the partnership</li> </ul>
<b>Complementary Competencies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No one single partner needs to be able to do everything</li> <li>The net of the partnership has all the competencies and skills necessary to carry out the project</li> </ul>
<b>Adequate Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partners share the resources necessary (including time) to carry out the project in the short-term</li> <li>Partners share the resources necessary to carry out the project in the long-term and to be sustainable</li> </ul>

## Operations

Operations refers to the operating processes and structures of the partnership, from very basic administrative elements such as meeting schedules and structures, to more complex elements such as conflict resolution and power equalization. Operations are reflective of how the partners work together.

In addition to goodness of fit and capacity, operations as an element of partner readiness ensure that systems are in place for partners to effectively work together, leading towards trusting and lasting relationships. There are four key indicators of operations, and these are summarized in the following table:



Four Indicators of Operations and What They Mean (Andrews et al., 2010)	
<b>Congruent Goals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The goals of the partnership are clearly stated</li> <li>• The goals of the partnership are mutually agreed upon</li> <li>• The agreed upon goals serve as an ongoing guide for the partnership</li> </ul>
<b>Transparent Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearly established mechanisms for communication are in place</li> <li>• There are clear expectations for frequencies of communication and for what will be communicated</li> </ul>
<b>Conflict Resolution</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A transparent and predetermined process is in place for resolving disputes that may arise during the course of collaboration</li> </ul>
<b>Equal Power</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power is shared equally among partners</li> <li>• Power is shared in such a way that there is mutual ownership of the project/process</li> <li>• Equity among the partners is promoted</li> </ul>

### Important Considerations in Partner Readiness

- While all three dimensions of partner readiness (goodness of fit, capacity, and operations) are important to successful collaboration, goodness of fit is considered to be the most critical. This is because goodness of fit is essential in building credibility and trust among partners. Without a sense of shared values, commitment, mutual benefit, and compatible climate, it will be very difficult for the partners to work together to create meaningful change that can be sustained in a community.
- Levels of readiness among the same partners can vary significantly depending on the issue being addressed, other partners that are involved in the effort, and the contexts of each partnership. ***Even if the same organizations or individuals are involved in multiple partnerships, partner readiness should be addressed relative to the specific topic of focus.***
- Levels of readiness will fluctuate throughout a collaborative process depending on the stage of the project and contextual factors that may arise over the course of the project.
- While levels of readiness can be measured at any stage of a collaborative process, readiness is also a process itself. Many of the indicators of partner readiness are iterative, dynamic, influenced by a range of environmental factors and contexts throughout the community, and have the potential to change markedly during the course of a community-based process. For example, there may be transitions in leadership within partner organizations, the availability of resources to support the partnership can change, collaborative membership may decrease or increase, and



organizational commitment to the collaboration can fluctuate based on shifting organizational priorities. It is therefore important to monitor partner readiness indicators not only at the beginning of a collaborative effort, but at regular stages throughout the process as well.

- Monitoring the twelve indicators of partner readiness can be a fairly effortless process through the use of simple survey tools. The process itself can be extremely informative to partners by showing changes in alignment among the partners over time. Guiding questions can be developed for each of the twelve indicators, with partners rating their own levels of readiness on a simple Likert (descriptive) or number scale. An example can be found on page 63. Responses can be averaged and displayed in chart or graph form as a baseline at the beginning of the partnership, as well as at pre-determined intervals during the collaborative process to assist partners in identifying areas of growth, identifying areas where challenges exist, and tracking overall changes in readiness over time.
- Monitoring indicators of partner readiness can serve as an excellent tool as partnerships evolve and needs and circumstances change. It can provide opportunities for collaborative partners to preemptively address both internal and external threats and challenges to collaboration before they become significant enough to jeopardize the partnership, as well as recognize and celebrate the achievements of the partnership itself. Readiness levels can also be used as a tool to aid in the development of partnership goals in strategic planning.

## In Summary

Assessing each of the twelve indicators of partner readiness to collaborate can serve as an effective tool to facilitate transparent discussion of many of the critical factors addressing the ability of collaborative partners to meaningfully work together. By taking the time to develop each of the indicators during the initial stages of collaboration, partners can work towards developing a solid foundation for creating lasting impact in the community.

***Levels of readiness in each of the dimensions discussed will fluctuate throughout the life of a project.*** It is not necessary for partners to achieve perfection in all twelve indicators. However, it is important for partners to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses in all of these areas, monitoring them over time and including strategic goals in planning to raise levels of partner readiness to collaborate.

A summary of the twelve dimensions and indicators of partner readiness to collaborate is in the following table:

Dimensions and Indicators of Partner Readiness for Community-based Participatory Research (Andrews et al., 2010)		
Goodness of Fit	Capacity	Operations
• Shared Values	• Effective Leadership	• Congruent Goals
• Compatible Climate	• Inclusive Membership	• Transparent Communication
• Mutual Benefit	• Complementary Competencies	• Conflict Resolution
• Commitment	• Adequate Resources	• Equal Power

### References: Want to Learn More about Partner Readiness to Collaborate?

- The article, *Partnership Readiness for Community-Based Participatory Research*, by Jeanette O. Andrews, Susan D. Newman, Otha Meadows, Melissa J. Cox, and Sheila Bunting (Health Education Research, 2010) offers an in-depth description of the three dimensions and twelve indicators of partner readiness to collaborate, as well as a description of the process undertaken to identify these indicators. The article also contains a useful list of competencies to be considered for partnerships, and a diagram showing how the components of partner readiness facilitate outcomes and effectiveness in collaboration.
- *Are We Ready? A Toolkit for Academic-Community Partnerships in Preparation for Community-Based Participatory Research* by Jeanette O. Andrews, Susan D. Newman, Melissa J. Cox, and Otha Meadows provides additional detail about the partner readiness model, as well as sample discussion questions and activities that collaborative groups can utilize to help assess and facilitate readiness to collaborate. This toolkit is available for download from [http://academicdepartments.musc.edu/sctr/programs/community\\_engagement/tools\\_resources\\_glossary.htm](http://academicdepartments.musc.edu/sctr/programs/community_engagement/tools_resources_glossary.htm).

## Community Readiness

Community readiness refers to the degree to which a community is prepared to take action on an issue and support efforts in the community. Conducting an assessment of community readiness as part of a broader assessment of community needs regarding the issue being collaboratively addressed, and prior to implementation of strategic actions in the community, will ensure that activities undertaken by a collaborative partnership are targeted towards the correct level of readiness in the community – that is, that they will be supported by the community. This is important because if efforts undertaken by the partnership are not consistent with the existing stage of community readiness, those efforts become vulnerable to breakdown due to a lack of community support. Some important points to consider in community readiness include:



- Many times programs may fail not because of the programs themselves or because of the relationships between the collaborative partners, but due to the lack of support received from a community if strategies are implemented before a community has accepted that the problem exists.
- Measuring community readiness is a simple and inexpensive process that helps ensure collaborative efforts will be successful in a community.
- Just as partners and stakeholders must know their goals are congruent and that they are a good fit to work together on an issue, they must also know that the goals they set out to achieve have a high probability of being supported in the community.
- If efforts do not succeed in the community, this can lead to rapid declines in morale, increasing the potential for the partnership to disintegrate, and decreasing future readiness to collaborate.
- There is an ongoing cycle that occurs with community readiness where high functioning coalitions or partnerships, coupled with positive outcomes, lead to increased community readiness, and increased community readiness leads to higher functioning coalitions and more positive outcomes. Therefore, monitoring community readiness is a



useful tool in analyzing the effectiveness of collaborative partnerships surrounding a particular issue.

### Tri-Ethnic Model of Community Readiness

The Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research at Colorado State University has developed a community readiness model that assists groups in developing language to communicate community readiness and assess progress, as well as develop programs that are tailored to explicit issues in their community. (Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research, 2014).

This model assesses five dimensions of community readiness particular to the issue and the context of the issue in the community. The assessment is designed to help groups target programs and interventions that are appropriate to the level of community readiness to ensure there is adequate support from the community.

Once an issue is identified by the collaborative partners, the target community is defined and six to ten key informants are identified who represent a broad cross-section of the community. Key informants might represent such community sectors as government, healthcare, education, social services, and law enforcement. Based on key informant interviews, each of the five dimensions of community readiness is scored from 1-9 based on pre-defined stages of readiness. These scores are then averaged to come up with an overall community readiness score. Summaries of the dimensions and stages of community readiness are in the following tables:

The Five Dimensions of Community Readiness and What They Mean	
Community Knowledge of the Issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much community members know about the issue, and whether there are any misperceptions by community members about the issue</li> <li>• What type of information is available in the community about the issue, and how people find out about the issue</li> </ul>
Community Knowledge of Efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What efforts exist in the community to address the issue, and to what degree the community is aware of these efforts</li> <li>• Strengths and weakness of current efforts</li> </ul>
Community Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much of a concern the issue is to the community</li> <li>• Whether community members are supportive of addressing the issue</li> <li>• Whether addressing the issue is a priority for community members</li> </ul>
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much of a concern the issue is to leadership in the community</li> <li>• How much of a priority addressing the issue is to leadership</li> <li>• Whether leadership would commit resources to the effort</li> <li>• Are there particular leaders who support or oppose efforts</li> </ul>
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How current efforts are funded</li> <li>• What resources are available in the community to address the issue</li> <li>• Whether community members are seeking additional resources</li> </ul>

The Nine Stages of Community Readiness and What They Mean		
1	No Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issue is not a concern to the community or leadership</li> <li>• Community has no knowledge about the issue</li> <li>• No resources are available to address the issue</li> </ul>
2	Denial/ Resistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only few community members have knowledge about the issue</li> <li>• General idea that the issue can't or doesn't need to be addressed</li> <li>• May be misconceptions about the issue and efforts</li> <li>• Lack of support to use available resources to address the issue</li> </ul>
3	Vague Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belief that the issue may be a concern, but no immediate motivation to act</li> <li>• Community has only vague knowledge about the issue</li> <li>• Limited resources to address the issue</li> <li>• A few community members have heard of efforts, but know little</li> </ul>
4	Pre-Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledgement that issue is a concern and something should be done to address it</li> <li>• Community has limited knowledge about the issue</li> <li>• Limited resources to address the issue</li> </ul>
5	Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most community members have heard about local efforts</li> <li>• Active support from leadership and the community</li> <li>• Community members have basic knowledge about the issue</li> <li>• Some resources are identified to address the issue</li> </ul>
6	Initialization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most community members have basic knowledge about the issue and efforts to address it</li> <li>• Community and leadership see it as their responsibility to address the issue</li> <li>• Resources are obtained to address the issue</li> </ul>
7	Stabilization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most community members have more than just basic knowledge</li> <li>• Ongoing community involvement and active involvement of leadership</li> <li>• Allocated resources are expected to provide ongoing support</li> </ul>
8	Confirmation/ Expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most community members have considerable knowledge about the issue and local efforts</li> <li>• Majority of community strongly supports efforts Allocated resources are expected to provide continuous support and additional resources are being sought</li> <li>• Leadership has key role in expanding and improving efforts</li> </ul>
9	High Level of Community Ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most community members have considerable and detailed knowledge about the issue and local efforts</li> <li>• Leadership continually reviews evaluation results</li> <li>• Most segments of the community are highly involved and supportive</li> <li>• Diversified resources and funding are secured</li> </ul>

In conducting and interpreting community readiness, it is important to remember the following:

- Scores may vary between the five dimensions of community readiness, and may flux over time.
- The results of a community readiness assessment can be used by the collaborative partners to aid in their assessment of the issue in the community, and design strategies relevant to the community's level of readiness to take action and support efforts.
- A baseline community readiness assessment, with follow-up assessments done at regular intervals, can help the collaborative partners assess their progress and communicate these achievements to the community.
- Community readiness assessment can help identify potential challenges ahead of time, allowing partners to proactively address issues, increasing the likelihood of success and strengthening the collaborative partnership.
- As partners observe community readiness scores increasing over time, their motivation to continue in the partnership increases and partnerships become more likely to be sustainable and long-lasting.

### In Summary

Community readiness assessment is an important tool that can be utilized to ensure actions taken by collaborative partners will be supported in the community and thus be more likely to succeed. As part of a broader assessment of needs and assets in a community related to a specific issue that is being collaboratively addressed, community readiness provides important information to guide planning efforts. Measuring community readiness levels as a baseline and over time can provide useful feedback to collaborative partners about whether their efforts are successful. Increasing levels of community readiness over time are one indicator of success in a collaborative partnership.

### References: Want to Learn More About Community Readiness?

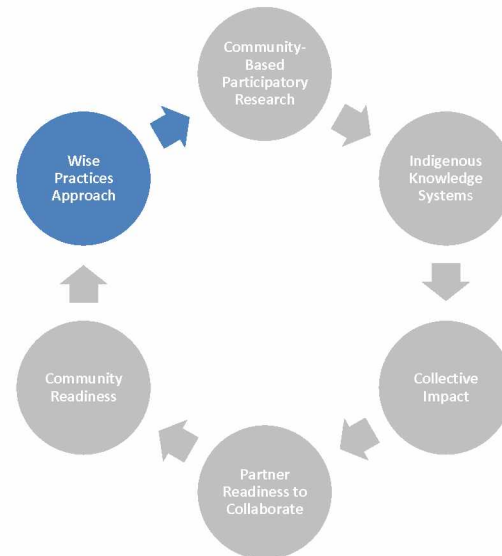
- *Community Readiness for Community Change* is a handbook developed by the Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research at Colorado State University to assist communities in conducting community readiness assessment. This handbook provides in-depth descriptions of the dimensions and stages of community readiness, as well as instructions and tips for conducting your own community readiness assessment. It can be downloaded for free from [http://triethniccenter.colostate.edu/communityReadiness\\_home.htm](http://triethniccenter.colostate.edu/communityReadiness_home.htm)



## Wise Practices Approach

Recent years have brought an increased focus from funders on what are referred to as “best practices.” Best practices are approaches that have been demonstrated to be effective and are considered to be superior to other approaches.

However, in rural communities especially, designated best practices are not in fact always the best approach, especially when faced with a unique set of circumstances, geographic characteristics, cultures, and contexts. Varying levels of community capacity, varied resources, and the culture of a community all impact the relevance and appropriateness of various models.



Part of what makes a rural community strong is its uniqueness in-and-of itself – and communities typically strive to retain this uniqueness. While there is value in selecting and utilizing practices that have been proven to be effective, it is beneficial to the creation of effective and meaningful collaboration to consider whether there are circumstances that require modifications to best practice models to fit the community.

- The use of defined best practices can be less effective than intended; it is important to first consider what and whose criteria or standards are used to define a practice as “best.”
- What is considered a best practice in one community may not be a good fit for another community.
- ***There is no “silver bullet” or one-size-fits-all approach to community development, particularly when working with small rural communities.*** Each community must be allowed to develop or modify its own model of practice, utilizing a set of tools and practices that are likely to be successful in that community’s web of relationships, issues, and resources, as well as respects the nuances and individuality of a community.

Wise Practices refer to practices that are contextual, and that reflect the culture, relationships, and uniqueness of a community. The inclusion of community context in the Wise Practices Approach to collaboration and community development is in contrast to the model of Best Practices, where context of the community is not explicitly taken into account. A fundamental

tenet of Wise Practices is that in order for collaborative partners to succeed, leadership must understand and be familiar with the intricacies of the community, so that strategies and practices that are utilized are appropriate to the community.

Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou (2010) identify seven factors for success when employing a Wise Practices Approach in community development efforts. Wise Practices are defined as “locally appropriate actions, tools, principles or decisions that contribute significantly to the development of sustainable and equitable social conditions.” While the Wise Practices Approach was developed in the context of aboriginal community development, a “wise practice” rather than a “best practice” approach is appropriate for any rural community collaborating to improve community health.

The seven factors identified as important to success when utilizing a Wise Practices Approach are summarized in the table below. Consideration of these factors helps to ensure that activities undertaken are culturally appropriate, supported by effective leadership and planning, that there is accountability and evaluation, and that there is an emphasis on building relationships.

<b>Success Factors to Wise Practices (Wesley-Esquimaux &amp; Calliou, 2010)</b>	
<b>Identity and Culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong understanding and knowledge of the culture and community</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective leadership that is in place to see a project through to completion</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic Vision and Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A long-range vision and path to build efforts around, focus resources, and mobilize partners</li> </ul>
<b>Governance and Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective systems, structures, and processes to carry out the work</li> </ul>
<b>Accountability and Stewardship</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparent accountability for decisions and allocation of resources</li> </ul>
<b>Performance Evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtaining feedback through a variety of mechanisms to measure progress</li> </ul>
<b>External Relationships and Partnerships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships with external funders and supporters</li> </ul>



## In Summary

It is within a mindset of “wise practices” rather than “best practices” that we should work with rural communities, bringing suggestions and recommendations to the partnership, but always with an open mind to the possibility that nuances may exist to ensure better fit to a community.

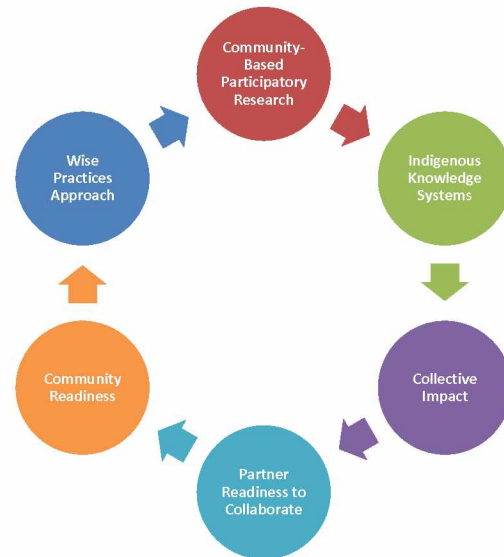
***By using success factors for wise practices as a guide rather than focusing on a one-size-fits-all approach to community development, strategies and frameworks can be modified to fit the individual needs of both the community and the collaborative project at hand, leading to a higher probability of success in collaborative efforts.***

## References: Want to Learn More About Wise Practices?

- *Best Practices in Aboriginal Community Development: A Literature Review and Wise Practice Approach* by Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux and Brian Calliou (2010) provides an in-depth description of the challenges of utilizing best practice models in aboriginal communities, as well as the development of the wise practices approach to community development. This resource also includes descriptions of the factors identified for success using a wise practices approach. The guide can be downloaded from [http://www.researchgate.net/publication/259176947\\_Best\\_Practices\\_in\\_Aboriginal\\_Community\\_Development\\_A\\_Literature\\_Review\\_and\\_Wise\\_Practices\\_Approach](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/259176947_Best_Practices_in_Aboriginal_Community_Development_A_Literature_Review_and_Wise_Practices_Approach)
- Several additional resources about Wise Practices can be found on the Banff Centre website at <http://www.banffcentre.org/?s=wise+practices>

## Frameworks – Putting Them Together

The frameworks presented here can be used in concert with each other to form a platform and foundation for effective collaborative efforts. While each framework is individually valuable, the total sum is greater than the parts, for each framework provides elements that support and strengthen the others. For example:

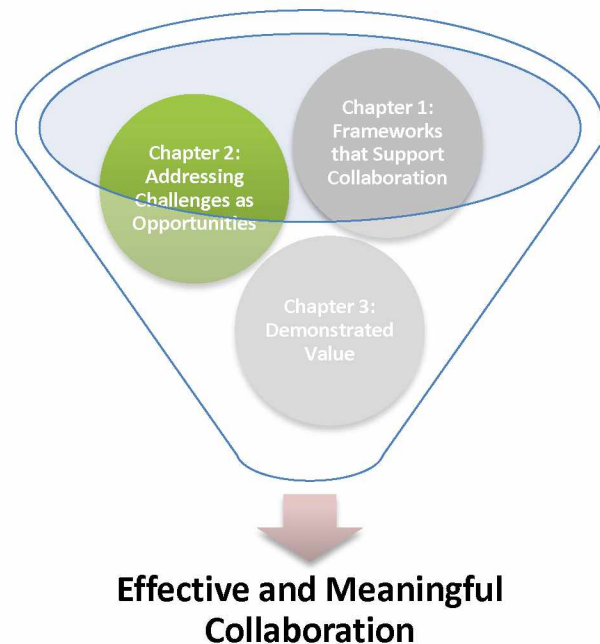


- There is an ongoing cycle that occurs with community readiness where high functioning coalitions or partnerships, coupled with positive outcomes, lead to increased community readiness. Likewise, increased community readiness leads to higher functioning coalitions and more positive outcomes. This reflects the cyclical nature of knowledge development offered in indigenous knowledge systems.
- The existence of a backbone organization, as the Collective Impact Model suggests, can provide a staff person with the skills and capacity to monitor both partner readiness and community readiness, track changes over time, and provide important feedback to collaborative partners.
- An approach that uses “wise” practices rather than “best” practices emphasizes that no one approach is better than the other and there is no “best” way to approach anything. Rather it is a collection of knowledge that grows and builds upon itself with relationships and context taken into account, as indigenous approaches suggest, that provides an important foundation for successful collaboration. Similarly, the Collective Impact Model focuses on the emergence of solutions as partners learn and grow together over time.
- Incorporation of elements of community-based participatory research ensures that the community is involved in every step of the project. Ensuring the involvement of all community members and stakeholders that are necessary to sustain efforts is a key indicator in the partner readiness model.

Finally, remember that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to collaboration. Take the pieces of each of these frameworks that work in your own community context to make your own framework and you’ll be on your way!

## Chapter 2: Addressing Challenges as Opportunities

Challenges are a fact of collaboration. However, as much as we may work to avoid them, challenges are a fundamental and central part to collaboration. They are in fact necessary for growth of the partnership to occur. When challenges are brushed under the rug or we gingerly walk around them, we miss opportunities to learn and grow together as a group, a critical building block to successful and long-lasting collaboration.



***Challenges become something to embrace when we learn to view them as indicators of opportunities for growth and improvement. By skillfully addressing challenges and respectfully resolving them as they arise, we strengthen collaborative relationships and learn to work together better.***

The dynamics of collaborative structures and relationships are continually subject to change as interests, agendas and commitments of partners, organizations and the community evolve. Challenges may stem from myriad sources such as bringing people together who have not collaborated before, competition and mistrust over funding, difficulty coming to agreement over shared agendas and measurements, a changing local political environment, changes in leadership or collaborative membership, and shifting goals or community needs.

There are several key points to remember when faced with challenges in a collaborative environment:

- Every challenge can also be viewed as an opportunity. These opportunities are limitless, but may include such things as better defining goals or processes, structures of the partnership, or strengthening communication and relationships.

- Preparing the collaborative partners from the beginning to anticipate change over the course of the collaboration will help facilitate smoother transitions when changes do occur.
- Challenges must be proactively and skillfully addressed before and as they arise. This helps ensure that partnerships do not become vulnerable to disintegration due to unresolved conflict.
- Challenges are opportunities for partners to learn together and collectively problem-solve, further strengthening the partnership and project outcomes over time.

On the following pages are descriptions of many of the common challenges faced by collaborations, and opportunities that can be found within these challenges to help strengthen partnerships as they are resolved.



## Leadership and Succession Planning

Trusting relationships are built between collaborative partners when trusting relationships are built between each partner and the leader of the collaborative effort. Even when a leader has been in place for years, some partners may have difficulty giving up control, making it challenging for leaders to do the job they were hired to do. Partners become accustomed to a leader's style and approach, and may even view that leader's presence as a requirement to continued involvement in the partnership.

Transitions in leadership are challenging. Learning curves may be steep, a new leader must navigate a complex web of relationships, and collaborating partners must adjust to different leadership styles. However, new leadership also brings opportunity. A new leader can inject enthusiasm into an existing partnership by bringing new ideas and collaborative approaches to the table.

Succession planning is vital to effective transitions in leadership. Written policies, procedures and bylaws ease leadership transitions, and clearly stated job descriptions, responsibilities, and qualifications can guide a leader in understanding expectations of the partners. Contingency plans for chain of command and filling of roles during unplanned absence of a dedicated leader should be written into bylaws or operating agreements, so that the partnership can continue to function during unexpected periods lacking a designated leader.

### Opportunities in Leadership

Have a clear job description in place for the leader that includes not just requirements for job duties, but also what characteristics the collaborative partners value in leadership to help guide the selection of new staff. ***When hiring a leader, that person's skills in facilitation and project management are just as important as their knowledge of the subject area.***

Collaborative partners must trust their leader to lead. A leader must be empowered to make administrative decisions, with clear guidance on what types of other decisions should be brought forth to the larger group for discussion.

***Neutrality is vital in collaborative leadership.*** While the leader may be employed by one of the collaborative partners due to fiscal agent status, it should be clearly outlined in the bylaws or operating guidelines of the partnership that the leader is equally accountable to all collaborative partners. This helps ensure that partners share equal power in the relationship.

It's helpful for a leader to have support from resources outside of the partnership, in the form of membership with a professional organization, or a consultant who provides regular support. This allows the leader to discuss sensitive issues with those who are not politically aligned with any single organization.

## Expectations

Partners often enter a collaboration with pre-determined ideas or expectations of what the goals of the other partners are or should be, what the solutions to the issue being addressed should be, and how the process will flow.

However, collaboration is unpredictable and requires a great deal of flexibility, due to the involvement and interactions of many partners. In the intricate situations that are often presented by collaboration, there are many variables that influence outcomes which cannot be known or predicted ahead of time; therefore, expectations are bound to differ. When partners become attached to the “how” of solving problems, it becomes easy to forget the “why” – that is, the reason they came together in the first place. This can lead to disappointment.

Particularly at the beginning of a collaborative effort, it is vital for open and transparent discussion to occur with all partners about their individual expectations of the partnership. While this takes time, it is also a critical first step in developing shared goals. People come to the partnership for a variety of reasons, and initial discussion of expectations provides an opportunity for partners to learn about each other and reduces the likelihood of incorrect assumptions about outcomes of the partnership that can later lead to the withdrawal of partners from the effort.

### **Opportunities for transparent discussion of goals and purpose lead to shared agendas**

Having expectations is normal. However, it is critical to take the time to clarify expectations and goals for the collaborative process from the very beginning of a project. This helps avoid any sense of unfulfilled expectations later on, which can cause partners to withdraw from the collaboration due to disappointment.

***This is a critical first step of collaboration even when the same group of partners has worked together on other issues before,*** and in these instances especially, is often forgotten. Expectations may differ greatly among the same group of partners from one project to the next.

Initial meetings present an opportunity for transparent discussion of expectations until consensus is reached about a shared agenda for the collaborative effort. Rather than hold expectations of what the process should be, partners should be led to expect a process of co-learning where ideas and solutions that result from mutual problem solving will emerge over time. By taking time to discuss expectation for the partnership from the outset, any disappointment of partners arising from false expectations can be minimized later.



## Power Struggles and Infighting

One of the most immense challenges of a coalition, but also potentially one of its greatest strengths, is the inclusion of diverse perspectives that are necessary to collectively research, plan, and implement these plans in the community. This may become an even greater challenge in communities where historical power imbalances exist.

As collaborative processes evolve and partners work together on a level playing field, the previously established power imbalances in a community will typically shift. This can often lead to conflict due to the loss of power by those who historically have held more power in the community, and the gain of power by those groups that have historically held less power. Power struggles may also result from a sense of no longer feeling in control of one's own entity as power in the community shifts from individual organizations to the larger collaborative group, with members holding each other accountable for their actions.

Various assets that partners bring to the table may also shift in response to the new collaborative relationships that are formed, and the positive or negative effects of those shifts may not always be evenly distributed.

These factors can lead to power struggles and infighting at critical junctures in the collaborative process. Infighting may also occur as partners utilize new or different approaches to addressing community issues than have previously been used in the community. These instances require a skilled facilitator who is comfortable with conflict mediation and collective problem solving. It also requires a willingness of partners to discuss uncomfortable issues. If infighting is not managed and channeled into productive discussions, it can become extremely destructive to the partnership in the long-run.

### **Conflict resolution presents an opportunity to strengthen relationships**

When infighting is appropriately managed and there is a skilled facilitator in place who is able to guide partners through the process of co-learning and creative problem solving, ***relationships can ultimately be strengthened as partners work through their differences and instead see their similarities in working towards a shared goal.***

The existence of a backbone organization as recommended by the Collective Impact Model, and a skilled facilitator, can be highly beneficial to this process. Collaborative development of rules of engagement by the partners can also help facilitate the resolution of differences.

***Neutrality of the facilitator is essential to successfully mediating conflict.*** If the facilitator is seen as an employee of one of the partners, other partners may not feel a sense of equal power. It is essential that the facilitator is accountable to all partners equally.

## Changing Goals and Agendas

As partnerships evolve and become more formalized, goals may also evolve or expand. Some partners may become uncomfortable with a shift in direction or goals, while others may be uncomfortable with expanding goals.

There can be risk in partners becoming sidetracked from the original goals of the partnership, as well as objectives becoming too broad as communities realize the collective possibilities of working together. However, sometimes it is necessary for goals or agendas to expand or shift as changes occur in the circumstances surrounding the partnership. The potential for conflict arises if not everyone is in agreement on the shifts in depth or breadth of these goals, or if people believe they have a shared goal when in fact they do not.

True collaboration can only occur when partners are willing to leave their individual agendas at the door - this can be the most difficult part of collaboration for many. However, when a shared agenda and goals support the strengths of each individual partner, and activities are mutually reinforcing so that collaborative partners are allowed to excel and reach their own goals within the larger shared goal, this leads to a higher likelihood of collaborative success.

Changing goals and differing agendas provide an ongoing opportunity for collaborative partners to continue to discuss, review and refine their shared values and goals as their relationships evolve.

**A culture that anticipates and supports change allows partners to adjust more easily as collaborative strengths are realized, community needs are better understood, and external factors impact the partnership**

Opportunity exists to reiterate or refine what is intended for the partnership as the strengths and influence of the partnership are realized and the needs of the community become better understood through the increased knowledge developed.

It is important to clearly document goals and objectives of the collaboration early on so they may act as a point of reference when questions or disagreements arise. ***Members of the collaboration should also be surveyed or interviewed at regular intervals to ensure the goals and objectives of the partnership continue to meet their needs.***

It is helpful to begin creating an expectation for change from the start of the partnership. Remind the collaborative partners to focus on the “what” and not be attached to the “how.” Set them up to understand that the strength of collaboration is the emergent learning that occurs as everyone builds knowledge collectively. When handled well, this can lead to innovative solutions that weren’t previously noticeable. Partners who remain flexible and are able to anticipate change are more likely to see unexpected opportunities to act upon.



## Competing Agendas

A common challenge in collaborative partnerships is competing agendas. Partners who are used to operating in silos may be challenged to place their own organizational agendas in the background while they work in collaboration together.

Establishing a shared mission, vision, set of values, and roles at the start of the partnership is critical. This process gives collaborating partners an opportunity to identify the roles they hope to play in community development efforts, and to minimize any incorrect assumptions or expectations about the partnership. Revisiting the mission, vision, values and roles for the partnership on an annual basis, or as needs and priorities of the partners evolve and change, is equally important to ensure that the agenda for the collaboration continues to be supported by all partners.

Groups that have clearly defined these guiding principles are more likely to secure funding and resources to help reach their goals, and thus are also more likely to be financially sustainable. But more importantly, having a shared mission, vision, values and roles provides a long-term guide for the partnership that serves as a touchstone to guide efforts and support partners in operating collaboratively over time rather than individually. When programs or strategies are being planned, or when conflicts arise between the partners, these guiding principles provide a foundation of collaboration for all partners to problem solve together, and ensure that any activities undertaken by collaborative partners continue to meet the intended purpose of the partnership.

### Tips for Developing a Shared Agenda

***Developing a shared mission, vision and set of values allows partners an opportunity to focus on their similarities rather than their differences.***

A shared mission, vision and set of values describe what collaborative partners want for the community, and how they plan to work together to get there.

It's helpful to remind partners that having a shared agenda doesn't mean they have to give up their own agendas. Rather it means that the group has mutually agreed upon goals that will not only create coordinated and lasting change in the community, but will also reinforce the work of each individual partner as the partners each contribute what they are good at to the larger whole.

Include the collaboration's mission, vision and values on all documents and communications, such as meeting agendas and minutes, to help remind partners of their common goals and why they came together. It's also helpful to include these principles when communicating with the community so that community members are able to understand why the partnership exists, and what the partnership intends to accomplish.

## Changing Coalition Membership and Participation

It is not unusual for participation in coalitions to drop off over time, or for coalition membership to change. Original collaborating partners may leave their agencies, may have reduced time to participate in efforts due to fluctuating organizational goals or requirements, or may simply have changing interests.

Remaining collaborative partners often are challenged when participation drops as well as when new members join the partnership. The departure of some members from the collaboration, as well as the addition of new members can create questions of trust for the remaining partners as new relationships are formed.

While high rates of turnover can affect coalition functioning and the consistency of group knowledge and vision, opportunities are also presented with turnover in membership that ultimately can lead to increased creativity and functioning of the group. These opportunities can include increasing the diversity, perspectives, and skills of the partnership, as well as clarifying member roles and responsibilities. Changes to membership also offer the partners an opportunity to re-examine goals and evaluate their relevance to the community, make any needed adjustments, and conduct outreach to the community as new members are simultaneously recruited.

### Opportunities with Changing Membership: Exit Interviews and Collaborating Partner Check-in

When partners leave a collaborative effort, an opportunity exists to learn how to improve operations for remaining and new members. Conducting an exit interview to understand why that person left can be extremely useful – it can provide valuable information about how to refine operations and strengthen practices to improve future retention of members.

It's equally important to check-in with existing members on a regular basis. ***At least annually the facilitator of the collaboration should conduct individual interviews with each partner.*** This keeps all partners engaged, builds trust with the leader, can alert you to potential challenges that are not readily apparent, and help you to capitalize on strengths and successes. A summary of these interviews can be presented to the group to heighten awareness of collaborative strengths as well as opportunities for improvement. Questions to ask collaborating partners might include:

- What have been the greatest successes of this effort?
- What have been the greatest challenges of this effort?
- What are your greatest challenges to continued participation?
- What do you think are the greatest opportunities going forward?
- What do you think are the greatest strengths of the group?
- What do you think we can improve upon most?



## Internal Board Functioning

Whether it is referred to as a board, steering committee, leadership team, or any other name, how well a board functions can directly impact effectiveness of a collaborative effort.

Internal board functioning includes financial and organizational components, as well as clarity of board roles and structure. Challenges can arise in board functioning as the collaborative partnership becomes more formalized and evolves over time. There may be disagreement over roles and functions of members, the level of formality or structure, and differing levels of commitment. Because of the direct impact of board functioning on larger coalition functioning, these differences must be skillfully mediated to avoid conflict.

Establishing ground rules or guidelines for interaction among collaborative partners helps ensure that discussions remain respectful and constructive, and that the group will continue to work effectively towards the intended goals of the partnership. In addition, clearly outlined procedures for meetings, budgeting, decision-making, and membership requirements should be included in bylaws or operating guidelines of the partnership.

Documented commitment by all partners to roles, responsibilities and procedures in the form of a fully signed memorandum of agreement (MOA) or bylaws helps ensure that collaborative operations are smooth, builds trust among partners, and ensures that responsibilities are equally distributed. It also assists in orientation of new members to the partnership and in leadership transitions.

### **Importance of Clearly Defined Roles, Responsibilities, Expectations, and Operations**

Clearly defined board member roles in the partnership, as well as the purpose of the partnership itself, are critical to ensuring board members understand their responsibilities and expectations, leading to healthy board functioning.

In addition to member roles and responsibilities, internal operating procedures such as meeting schedules and structure should be clearly outlined. A dedicated staff person can help facilitate development of written roles and responsibilities, and document procedures and processes for the collaboration.

***Even if the collaboration is not incorporated, it should still have bylaws or operating guidelines in place that are signed by all members.***

These should include at least the following elements:

- Expectations for participation and meeting attendance
- Meeting structure and frequency
- Decision-making process and quorum requirements
- Fiscal responsibility
- Supervision of facilitator
- Process for adding new members
- Term limits

## Funding and Financial Commitment

Securing funding to support the infrastructure of a formalized collaborative approach, including a staff member to facilitate the process, can be challenging. Funding sources typically are structured to fund a project or problem, rather than the development of an infrastructure that supports a collaborative approach to the problem.

The Collective Impact Model highlights that large-scale change comes from improved coordination and collaboration across sectors of the community, rather than through the isolated efforts of individual organizations. However, funders typically fund the individual organization that they believe has the best potential to create change. As a result, organizations compete with each other for funding, working hard to solely demonstrate their own impact on the issue (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Unfortunately, this cycle motivates organizations towards competition rather than collaboration, presenting a challenge to collaborative partnerships.

Once funding has been obtained to support a collaborative initiative, one member of the partnership must act as fiscal agent and be responsible for management of funds. This can contribute to both real and *perceived* power imbalances. Partners may correctly or incorrectly perceive underlying financial intentions of the fiscal agent. Whether these power imbalances are real or perceived, they unfortunately can become further reinforced through community perceptions of the fiscal agent as the leader of the collaborative effort.

### What's Underneath the Funding Conflict?

Issues over funding and financial commitment are often indicative of past historical conflict between organizations in the community. However, when addressed skillfully, these issues offer an opportunity for resolution of historical events that have led to power imbalances. It also offers ***opportunity for transparent discussion of values, criteria and guidelines for how money will be spent in the community***, further defining roles of the partners in the collaborative effort.

If there is conflict over funding during the course of collaboration, clarify expectations for commitment to the partnership, roles and relationships, guidelines for budgeting and how funds will be spent, and how value of the partnership will be demonstrated. Partners should also consider in-kind contributions to the effort in the context of funding discussions, such as contributions of office space and staff resources.

When seeking funding opportunities to support collaborative goals, opportunities may arise for discussion about the potential for increased impact through collaboration, collaborative and creative problem solving, and acquisition of funding that supports pre-determined and coordinated goals *across* community organizations, rather than for single organizations in isolated efforts.



## Demonstration of Value

As organizations contribute employee time and financial resources to a collaborative effort, they will understandably begin asking for tangible demonstration of value in the collaborative effort to continue justifying participation. This is especially true during the early stages of collaboration when relationships are being formed, foundations are being built, and community outcomes have yet to be seen because the foundation for these outcomes is still being formed.

In extreme cases, these foundations can take a period of years to develop. ***Those partners who are especially action-oriented in their approach to community work may find it very difficult to see value in earlier stages of collaboration,*** when focus lies much more heavily on the building and strengthening of relationships and big picture planning, rather than action steps and population health outcomes.

It is important to define how value will be demonstrated early in the partnership. At this stage, opportunities also exist for partners to ***define what success will look like,*** and to facilitate transparent discussions of expected outcomes of their participation in the effort. Instead of traditional retrospective evaluation, collaborative efforts can benefit from developmental evaluation that is focused on the development of relationships between people and organizations over time, as well as problems or solutions that are identified through the process of collaboration.

### Opportunities for Demonstrating Value

While demonstrating tangible value may seem elusive in the early, formative stages of collaboration, there are many strategies that can be used to help partners find value before population health outcomes resulting from the collaboration may be realized.

Baseline partner readiness and community readiness assessments can be conducted and repeated at regular intervals during the initial stages of collaboration to demonstrate increasing levels of readiness to address the issue, as well as increasingly aligned partner goals, agendas, and operations.

Defining success early in the collaboration, as well as how success will be measured, is vital to ensuring all partners understand the process and results that are initially being sought. Facilitated discussion of frameworks that support collaborative foundations will help partners grasp the complexity of the task and the importance of a formative period prior to launching community initiatives.

An added focus on personal benefits from collaboration will also energize partners and ensure that they are gaining from participation in the effort.

## Thinking Style and Personality Differences

One of the biggest challenges to collaboration, especially as membership and partner roles shift, is mitigating differences between big-picture thinkers and detail-oriented thinkers, as well as process-oriented thinkers and action-oriented thinkers.

Meetings can quickly come to a stalemate when big-picture thinkers are focused on brainstorming new ideas, while detail-oriented thinkers are quietly worrying about the details of how those ideas will be carried out, and what that is going to add to their workload. Similarly, process-oriented thinkers may spend time discussing nuances of collaborative operations, while action-oriented thinkers may become frustrated with the lack of perceived action steps in the community.

Collaboration among different types of thinkers can be an extraordinary challenge at times, especially for the facilitator. It can be tempting to handpick partners with similar thinking or leadership styles. However, there is immense opportunity with diversity of thinkers, especially when a skilled facilitator is in place to guide the conversation and ensure all partners are heard.

***Often focus for inclusion or diversity in collaborations is on representation from community sectors. However, by also ensuring that different types of thinkers are represented in collaborative efforts, comprehensive plans can be put into place that accommodate the larger goals as well as the details needed to reach those goals, the processes that need to be followed to get there, and the action steps that will need to be taken.***

### Strategies for Managing Differences

Facilitating collaboration is often likened to herding cats. Add strong personalities and different types of thinkers, and you may have a recipe for frustration. However, ***by making personality differences fun, and helping partners celebrate rather than fear their leadership differences, they will better be able to work together and capture each person's strengths to achieve collaborative goals together.***

It's helpful if partners are facilitated through a process of identifying their own leadership style, as well as given the opportunity to share their style of leadership with each other. This is a positive way for collaborative partners to get to know each other better and learn to value their differences.

During meetings, it is also important to make sure everyone is heard and their contributions are noted. For example, if big picture plans are being discussed, and a detail-oriented thinker prematurely brings up details the group is not yet ready to address, make a note of these details on a white board or flip chart so everyone can see them.



## Partner Fatigue

Effective collaboration is hard work, and at times partners may feel like more work goes into it than benefit comes out. Collaborative partners often make a commitment to participate on top of their regular job duties, and may receive pressure from their own organizations to show value in their participation. They may also become frustrated if they do not perceive results are being achieved that are directly beneficial to them or to their organizations - many outcomes of collaboration are not readily visible or apparent.

Signs of partner fatigue include less participation during meetings, missed meetings, lack of engagement between meetings, lack of follow-through on assigned tasks, and both spoken and unspoken negativity towards the collaboration outside of meeting times.

When partners display signs of fatigue, it helps to hold transparent discussions about long-term goals of the collaboration and how value is determined, and to communicate the outcomes of these discussions to the community and representative organizations to support partners in their roles.

At times it may be worthwhile to hold a retreat to re-evaluate priorities and focus on strategic vision and goals for the collaboration. Outside consultants can be helpful in bringing a different perspective to the effort, as well as support the partnership's facilitator in meeting his or her goals for the group.

### Opportunities for Celebration

There are many ways to celebrate and highlight success in collaboration. Try passing around a success book at meetings for partners to jot down things they have collaboratively accomplished since they last met. This may be difficult at first, but over time partners will come to meetings prepared to report success. The cumulative list is a reminder of all that has been accomplished when fatigue sets in.

Regularly submit articles to local papers and hold annual community meetings highlighting collaborative goals and achievements. Partners appreciate the recognition in the community.

Partners can be supported by annual presentations to their organizational boards highlighting collaborative goals and achievements. This helps board members understand the value of staff participating in collaborative efforts.

Check-in with partners annually and ask them what they think are the greatest successes of the past year. Presenting a summary of these successes to all partners helps them see all that has been accomplished as a result of their hard work.

***Provide food at meetings.*** Partners are more effective when basic needs are met, and when they feel taken care of. These small comforts can go far in supporting collaboration.

## Meeting Structure and Attendance

For any effort to be truly collaborative, active participation is a requirement. Meeting attendance is vital to active participation and engagement in collaboration. Because participation in a collaborative effort is typically added onto an already full work schedule, meeting time must be used effectively to keep partners engaged.

If meetings occur too frequently, partners may be inclined to skip meetings because they feel like they won't miss much and will catch up at the next one. However, in the initial stages of collaboration, frequent meetings are typically necessary to establish strong relationships and working patterns. Monthly meetings during this time are recommended to help establish these relationships. Once relationships are firmly established, meetings may become less frequent, especially if strong communication patterns exist between meetings.

**Face to face meetings are essential when collaborating.** Even if geographic distances are large and travel costs are high, the payback is enormous. Communications are richer, discussions occur on a deeper level, and partners engage more actively when meeting face to face. If partners do not live in the community they serve, attending meetings in that community helps them gain a better understanding of the community and its needs. Meetings by telephone or webinar are not recommended except in the most extreme circumstances, as partners do not typically actively engage in this type of format.

### Making the Most of Meeting Time

It's a fact - longer meetings offer more effective use of meeting time. ***Instead of frequent and short meetings, hold meetings less frequently but for longer periods of time.*** This allows richer and more in-depth discussion about complex collaborative issues to take place, and adequate time for creative solutions to emerge out of discussion.

Enough time should lapse between meetings so there is new information to discuss at each meeting. If little has changed or happened since the last meeting, partners are likely to disengage. Enough time between meetings also gives partners an opportunity to complete their assigned tasks.

Provide food at meetings. Sharing food builds relationships, makes partners feel taken care of, and helps them work better because their basic needs are met.

Allow time at meetings for partners to share what's been going on in their own organizations. This helps partners better understand what each organization brings to the partnership.

Partners should not be allowed to send others to meetings in their place. It is essential for decision-makers to be present and for partners to feel that all others take the partnership equally seriously.



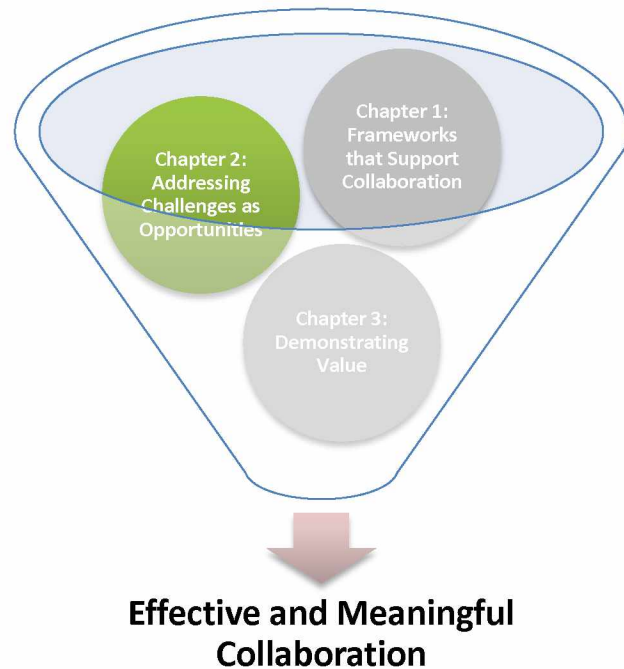
## Summary: Addressing Challenges as Opportunities

Many challenges are common to collaboration including transitions in leadership and membership, competing agendas, conflict over funding and past historical events, personality differences, and fatigue from collaboration.

Viewing and skillfully facilitating solutions to challenges that arise during the course of collaboration with an attitude of finding the opportunities to strengthen collaborative efforts, rather than as something to be avoided, will help collaborative partners continue to stay engaged in the collaborative process, learn and problem solve together, and ultimately build stronger relationships.

Partners should be reminded that these challenges are simply part of the collaborative process. If partners are prepared from the beginning for change and see it as a natural part of collaboration, then transitions will occur more smoothly and challenges will slowly become something to embrace rather than to avoid.

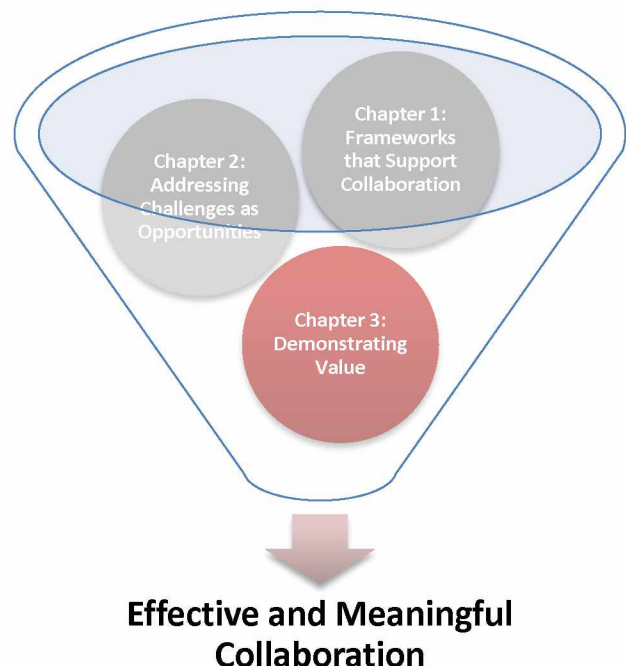
Resolving challenges in a context of opportunity brings a better understanding among partners of goals and purposes of the collaboration, clear agreement on what success looks like and how value is demonstrated, and clarity in the operations of the collaboration.



## Chapter 3: Demonstrating Value

Demonstration of value is one of the greatest challenges for collaborations, especially in the initial, formative years when efforts have a greater focus on developing the relationships that will later support reaching community health outcomes. Some key factors to consider in regards to demonstrating value are:

- It can be challenging to find tangible ways of communicating the value that collaboration provides to members of the partnership, to the organizations they represent, and to community members.
- ***Demonstration of value is critical to keeping partners engaged.*** While initial engagement of partners in collaboration can often result from excitement over something new, keeping partners engaged over time is typically much more challenging. Partners must demonstrate to their organizations why their time spent collaborating is beneficial to the organization, they may struggle with competing priorities, or may experience personal challenges in taking a collaborative approach to their work.
- Often collaborating partners want to see results in the context of community health outcomes. However, in their haste to achieve these outcomes, many forget the importance of the period of time required to build the foundation of relationships that is so essential to achieving the community health outcomes they came together to work towards. This is something that takes at least months, but often a year or more to achieve. Collaboration is simply hard work.
- When communicating value to the community, be sure to use language that's easy for lay community members to grasp – stay away from field-specific terminology, jargon, and names of models. Community members and organizations simply want to know what they're getting and how they are benefitting in a concrete way.



## How Can Value in Collaboration be Measured?

In conducting evaluation, it is important that information collected is useful and meaningful to the partnership and answers questions that help partners know whether they are reaching their goals. It is essential to measure progress on goals over time and to communicate this progress to partners as well as the community. While traditional evaluation practices primarily focus on quantitative measures and outcomes, excellent qualitative tools to measure collaborative processes exist as well.

- Regular assessment of both partner and community readiness help show the development of relationships and partnership goals, as well as the impact of the collaborative effort in the community.
- Annual key informant interviews conducted with each of the partners of the collaborative effort can evaluate changing perspectives on successes and challenges of the partnership over the previous year, as well as major impacts of the collaboration, opportunities for improvement, and greatest contributions to the partnership. Themes from these interviews can be summarized and compiled into a report to be shared with all members of the partnership.
- At the end of each meeting, a quick review by partners of what worked well and what needs improvement can help keep the concept of evaluation in the forefront for partners, as well as reinforce collaborative growth.

## Benefits of Collaboration to Consider in Demonstrating Value

Below is a list of ways that your collaboration may be benefitting the community. It is not an exhaustive list, but the questions provided will help you start thinking about how to demonstrate value in your collaboration, how to measure progress over time, and possible initial goals and action steps for your collaborative effort.

- How have participating organizations benefitted from the collaboration?
- Have letters of support from the collaboration helped individual organizations obtain funding?
- Has the existence of a supportive, collaborative network helped individual organizations successfully obtain funding by citing this support network in funding applications?
- Has your group been able to collectively advocate for increased support in the form of resources or services to the community? On a regional level, state level, national level?
- Has your community benefitted through increased awareness among service providers about what the others offer?

- Has redundancy in services among organizations decreased?
- Are providers making more referrals to each other?
- Have your members gained a better understanding of the needs of the community as a result of the collaborative process?
- Are collaborative partners working increasingly in partnership on key community issues, rather than in silos?
- Has your effort provided a coordinated means for community members to access information about health issues and/or services?
- Has the collaboration put a strategic plan into place, with shared goals and action items to benefit the community?
- Has the collaboration been able to provide increased training opportunities to community providers by working together?
- Has the infrastructure and/or paid staff for the collaboration enabled partners to work together more effectively?

### **Sample Evaluation Tool for Collaborative Partnerships Working to Improve Community Health**

On the following pages is a sample survey tool that can be used to evaluate collaborative partnerships that are working towards improving community health. An explanation of the purpose of each question in the survey is included.

The survey can easily be administered using an online survey tool such as Survey Monkey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/>), which allows for easy analysis of the data collected. It can also be administered on paper, or used as a framework for annual interviews of collaborative partners.



## Effective and Meaningful Collaboration to Improve Community Health Sample Collaborative Partner Survey

### 1. When did you become a member of (Collaboration)?

- ☐ Less than 1 year ago
- ☐ 1-2 years ago
- ☐ 3-4 years ago
- ☐ 5 or more years ago

*This question helps keep track of the length of partner membership. If you routinely observe partners leaving the collaboration after a short period of time, changes may need to be made.*

---

### 2. What do you think are the three greatest successes of (Collaboration)?

- a.
- b.
- c.

*Reporting back to the group on the greatest successes of the collaboration reminds partners of the work they have accomplished. It can also help you discuss value of the collaboration to member organizations and potential funders.*

---

### 3. How do you think (Collaboration) has benefitted the community the most? List up to three ways.

- a.
- b.
- c.

*Reporting back to the group on the greatest benefits of the collaboration to the community reminds partners of the value in the work they have accomplished. It can also help you discuss value of the collaboration to member organizations and potential funders.*

---

### 4. Thinking about your answers to the last two questions, what three factors do you think contributed most to these successes and benefits?

- a.
- b.
- c.

*The answers to this question reflect strengths in how the collaboration operates. These strengths can be utilized to support additional collaborative efforts*

---

**5. Do you feel that (Collaboration's) goals support the goals of your own organization?**

- ☐ Yes, definitely
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Only a little
- ☐ No
- ☐ N/A – I do not represent an organization

*This question is important because goals of the partnership must support goals of the member organizations for partners to find benefit in collaboration. If partners do not feel the goals support the goals of their own organizations, it may be a sign that the goals of the partnership need to be revisited.*

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**6. How have you personally benefitted from being part of (Collaboration)? List up to 3 ways:**

- a.
- b.
- c.

*This question is important because personal benefit from collaboration keeps partners motivated to continue working together. Leveraging those benefits of collaboration that partners value also helps collaborating partners stay engaged over time.*

---

**7. What do you think are the three greatest challenges (Collaboration) has faced?**

- a.
- b.
- c.

*It's important to be aware of challenges partners feel the collaboration has faced so you can proactively work to minimize these challenges in the future. If these are challenges that have been overcome, they are successes that you can report on as adding value to collaboration.*

---

**8. Are there certain factors that you think have contributed to these challenges? List up to three:**

- a.
- b.
- c.

*Knowing factors that have contributed to challenges helps you anticipate potential future challenges and address them before they have the potential to undermine future collaborative efforts.*

---

**9. What do you think are the three biggest current challenges facing (Collaboration)?**

- a.
- b.
- c.

*Knowing what challenges partners currently see is important. These are issues that should be proactively and openly discussed, capitalizing on strengths identified in question #4, to ensure that collaborative efforts continue to be productive and benefit the community as well as the collaborative partners.*

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**10. Are there challenges to your own continued participation in (Collaboration)? List up to three:**

- a.
- b.
- c.

*These are potential barriers to continued partner engagement. Any issues that are identified in answers to this question should be addressed as appropriate to ensure that partners remain engaged in efforts.*

---

**11. What do you think are the three greatest opportunities for (Collaboration)?**

- a.
- b.
- c.

*Opportunities that partners see in the collaborative effort are the same places where partners will find enthusiasm in collaboration. You can weave these opportunities into planning efforts to help keep partners engaged.*

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**12. What tools, skills or resources have been the most helpful to (Collaboration)? (specific surveys you have used, models of practice, resources, consultants, etc.)**

*Knowing what kind of resources, as well as what specific resources partners have found useful can help in planning efforts moving forward. For example, if there was a consultant that partners found especially helpful, you may want to bring that person back again in the future.*

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**13. Are there other tools, skills or resources you think would be helpful for (Collaboration) to succeed?**

*This question helps you identify whether there are other areas that partners feel the group could use more help or support with.*

---

**14. Do you think (Collaboration) is sustainable? (Does (Collaboration) have the financial resources, personnel, and community support needed to continue efforts long-term in the community?)**

- ☐ Yes, definitely  
☐ Maybe, with some changes  
☐ No

*Responses to this question will help you identify whether partners feel efforts are sustainable. If they don't, then action steps should be taken to work towards a more sustainable model of collaboration.*

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**15. Please rate how important you think it is to the long-term success of (Collaboration) to focus on developing each of the following areas:**

	Not Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Very Important
Leadership				
Governing Structure				
Funding				
Defining and/or Refining Mission, Vision and Values of (Collaboration)				
Community Support for (Collaboration)				
Organizational Buy-in and Support				
Communication between (Collaboration) members				
Communication between the (Collaboration) and the Community				
Technical Support from Outside Consultants and Resources				
(Collaboration) Membership Turnover and Growth				
Education and Training Opportunities for Members				
Development of measures to evaluate and report success towards (Collaboration) goals				
Other (Please Indicate)				

*Responses to this question identify components of collaboration that partners think are important to improve upon. Strategic goals should be developed for those areas identified as important for development. By comparing responses across partners, you can also identify whether partners share similar views on areas that need improvement, helping you assess whether partners share mutual goals and beliefs about the collaboration.*

---



**16. Please rate how much you agree with each of the following statements based on your own opinion about the current status of (Collaboration) and its (Board).**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
(Collaboration) partners have a sense of shared values, standards and principles					
(Collaboration) partners have common attitudes and beliefs about the partnership					
(Collaboration) provides benefit to all partners and the organizations they represent					
(Collaboration) partners share an equal level of commitment to the effort in time, resources, etc.					
(Collaboration) has effective leadership in place (Think about not just the leader but the overall leadership structure for the Collaboration)					
(Collaboration's) members include all sectors of the community needed to achieve the Collaboration's goals					
(Collaboration's) members encompass all the knowledge and skills that are collectively needed to accomplish the Collaboration's goals					
(Collaboration) has enough resources (both present and future) to accomplish its goals					
(Collaboration) has clearly defined goals that are mutually agreed upon by all the partners					
(Collaboration) has effective and transparent communication processes between partners, including mechanisms of communication, frequency of communication, and guidelines about what should be communicated					
(Collaboration) has a clearly established process for resolving conflicts that may arise during the course of collaboration					
(Collaboration) partners share equal power in the collaboration					

*Question 16 reflects the twelve indicators of partner readiness to collaborate. Responses to this question will help you understand levels of readiness to collaborate and areas where attention may need to be given to improve collaboration. Comparing results across partners in the collaboration can also reveal whether there are large differences in perceptions of readiness among the partners.*

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**17. Do you have any other comments about issues related to (Collaboration's) ability to effectively collaborate to improve the health of the community?**

*This question allows participants to provide any additional feedback, positive or negative, that may be helpful in facilitating effective collaboration.*

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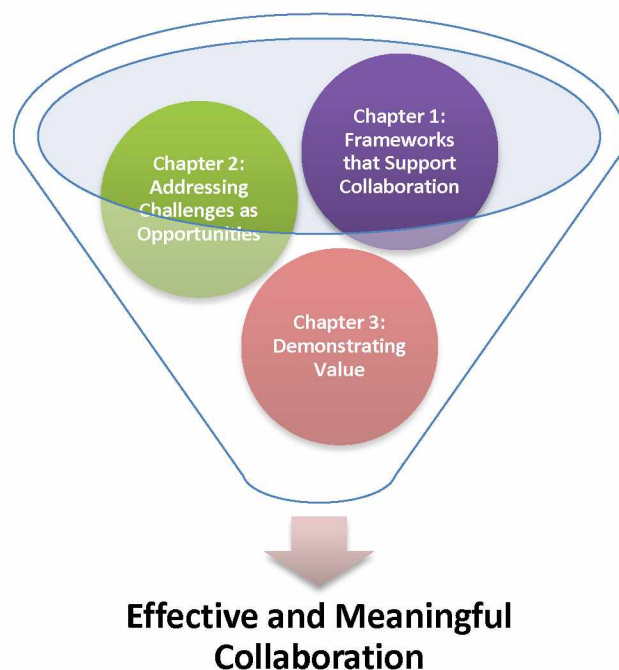
## Conclusion

Effective collaboration is hard work that requires commitment and willingness of partners to set aside their personal agendas to work towards a shared goal for the community. While collaboration is complex and often messy, utilizing a structured framework to support collaboration, as well as culturally appropriate and community-specific knowledge and approaches, is beneficial to collaborative efforts. Groups can proactively address challenges and seek the opportunities that lie within these challenges to demonstrate value in the partnership and lead to effective and meaningful collaboration to improve community health outcomes.

Through proactive assessment and evaluation of collaborative processes, potential challenges can be skillfully addressed, value can be demonstrated, and partnerships can be strengthened. Attention to collective learning and problem-solving can lead to creative solutions for the community that would not evolve by working alone.

While a significant investment of time is required up-front to develop foundational relationships that lead to successful collaboration, the long-term payback in the formation of lasting partnerships that address issues in a way that is relevant to the community are enormous.

-Happy *effective* and *meaningful* collaborating!



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Effective and Meaningful Collaboration to Improve Community Health

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### **Abstract**

This research project set out to identify those factors that are likely to lead to effective and meaningful collaboration among a broad range of stakeholders wishing to collaborate to improve health in rural communities. By studying two different collaborative efforts in rural Alaska that have succeeded in collaboration but have also faced many challenges, benefits of collaboration, challenges to collaboration, factors that contribute to benefits and challenges of collaboration, and important areas for development in collaboration were identified. Through the research study and a literature review conducted within the context of the researcher's professional experience, frameworks and tools were identified that can be used to help facilitate and support collaboration that is effective and meaningful in a community.



### **Biographical Introduction**

I have worked in program and community development in the area of healthcare, and especially rural healthcare, for over 15 years. Projects I have led or facilitated have included supporting rural hospitals throughout Washington State in the implementation of universal newborn hearing screening programs, leading and facilitating the initial formation and subsequent development of the Prince of Wales Health Network in Craig, Alaska, facilitation and leadership of the Homer Prevention Project in Homer, Alaska, and more currently, program development endeavors in a variety of contexts as a consultant in Alaska's Interior and Southcentral regions. During my time in these roles, I have observed and facilitated numerous groups in working to develop effective and meaningful collaborative efforts to improve the health of their communities. Through these experiences, I began to observe common themes about what does and does not work in collaboration, how definitions of collaboration and models for collaborative partnerships emerge over time, and challenges that exist across collaborative efforts.

More often than not, I observed a genuine and authentic desire of partners to collaborate, but with challenges resulting from not knowing "*how*" to collaborate. Many communities have groups wishing to collaborate, and in many cases these groups have no choice but to collaborate in order to effectively serve their communities, given present day decreases in funding levels and increases in demands. However, many rural communities do not have access to consultants and mentors to help them decode and demystify the many resources that could support their efforts at collaboration - something that I have been fortunate enough to have in my own career. As my career path began to evolve towards providing mentorship for other leaders working to

collaborate effectively, I was inspired to return to graduate school to earn a Master of Arts Degree in Rural Development through the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

### **Description of the Project**

This research project is titled “Effective and Meaningful Collaboration to Improve Community Health.” The ultimate goal of this project was to develop a handbook written to support leaders of collaborative efforts by providing resources and tools that have been both tested and utilized in rural communities, and have been shown to support the creation of effective collaboration. The intent for the handbook is to be written in language that is easy to understand, to present tools that can be easily translated into a wide range of community scenarios and contexts, and to provide additional resources that extend beyond just a bibliographic list, including information about how to implement these resources in real-life situations that are relevant to rural communities.

While the guide is directed towards those facilitating collaboration, it can also be utilized by collaborative partners at the community level, especially in learning how to support their leaders, understanding approaches to collaboration, and constructively addressing any challenges that may arise during the course of collaboration. Ultimately, it is intended to enhance the capacity of communities to collaborate in such a way that it is meaningful to the community and effective in achieving community goals.

### **Research Question**

The research question guiding the project was, “What factors contribute to creating effective and meaningful collaboration to improve community health?”

**Goals**

The goals of the project were two-fold. First, to develop a resource guide that can be shared with communities to support them in building capacity to effectively collaborate, based on real-world experiences and lessons learned in the context of collaborating to improve the health of rural communities, and second, to provide a strengths-based assessment and evaluation to those collaborations participating in the research providing feedback on their greatest strengths, challenges, successes, benefits, and opportunities to support them in collaborating more effectively.

**Project Benefits**

Benefits of the research include benefits to communities, as well as to the researcher. Benefits to myself (as the researcher) include 1) a tool to support my work consulting with communities, and 2) expansion of my knowledge base to more effectively work with communities and the diverse range of stakeholders they represent. These benefits ultimately will benefit communities I work with by increasing my ability to provide them with the support they need to collaborate effectively. Increased support to leaders of collaborative efforts will enable them to support others in the community in various facets of collaboration through demonstration of effective collaborative practices, thereby increasing the overall capacity of communities to improve their own health from within. Furthermore, for those communities participating in the research, a strengths-focused evaluation will support the development of their collaborative infrastructure to more effectively reach their goals.

**Research Participants**

Two existing collaborations in rural communities of Alaska were selected to participate in the research. These are the Prince of Wales Health Network located in Craig, Alaska (POW

Health Network), and Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships of the Southern Kenai Peninsula (MAPP of the SKP). Both collaborative efforts are focused on improving the health of the community, and were selected for a number of reasons. First, the researcher had a personal connection with both of these communities and collaborative efforts through previous employment. The background knowledge of each group provided helpful context to the research, as well as an understanding of how value could be provided back to each community. In addition, the POW Health Network and MAPP of the SKP share several similar characteristics, enabling comparisons and contrasts. They have both been in existence for approximately the same period of time, they share similar overall goals, they have a similar governance structure with a Steering Committee comprised of decision-making level representatives of member organizations and a paid staff person to facilitate the operations of the collaboration, and neither effort has been incorporated as its own entity (both utilize a fiscal agent to pass money through). Two important contrasts also exist between the two entities that proved valuable to examine. First, the POW Health Network spent a number of years up front focused on the development of relationships and infrastructure, whereas MAPP of the SKP spent much less time up front developing relationships and infrastructure. Second, the POW Health Network employs a more formal leadership structure, with a visible leader in the community, whereas MAPP of the SKP employs a less formal leadership structure with a focus on a shared leadership model.

The Prince of Wales (POW) Health Network is a collaboration of healthcare organizations serving the residents and communities of Prince of Wales Island, in Southeast Alaska. The POW Health Network was formed in 2008 when competitive funding was received from the federal Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) Office of Rural Health



Policy (ORHP) focused on developing a health network of organizations to better serve the healthcare needs of island residents. Original members of the Network were the City of Craig, PeaceHealth and Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC), and later expanded to include Craig Public Health and Alaska Island Community Services. More recently, numerous smaller, local organizations such as dental, pharmacy, and social service groups joined the Network. The POW Health Network spent a period of over two years in a formative stage of development, developing infrastructure and strengthening relationships among the primary care organizations serving Prince of Wales Island communities. During this time, the original partners worked to resolve past conflict, and successfully built a foundation nested in these relationships that would later serve as a platform to build community objectives from. The POW Health Network expanded slowly over time, adding members and objectives as the partnerships became more solidified. Today, funding has been secured through numerous sources, and includes federal grants, state grants, private local donations, and member contributions. Alaska Native people account for approximately 30% of the population served by the Network. The POW Health Network intentionally chose not to seek incorporation as a separate entity, and instead uses one of its member organizations as a fiscal agent, passing through funds and employing the Network Director.

MAPP of the SKP, located in Homer, Alaska, was also formed in 2008, with the original purpose of conducting a community health needs assessment to serve as a foundation for improving the health of the region which includes all communities of the Southern Kenai Peninsula, for which Homer serves as a hub. A community-driven framework based in a public health model was employed called Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP), and this framework was adopted very early on as part of the identity of the

collaboration. Through its ongoing community health assessment process, MAPP of the SKP identifies action goals for the community and acts as an umbrella for community efforts related to these goals. MAPP of the SKP has enlisted very broad community membership from the time it was formed, with membership including the local hospital, public health, local college, local environmental groups, local primary care, mental health providers, and women's shelter. A fundamental tenet of this group is that health is defined broadly, beyond just physical health. MAPP of the SKP dedicated less time up front to building structural foundation, launching almost immediately into developing community goals and action plans. In recent years, MAPP partners have worked to more clearly define their operations, roles, and purposes to serve as a stronger foundation. Funding to support this effort has come from various sources, including the local hospital service area board and small grants, with the largest source of funding a state grant to specifically address alcohol abuse in the community. The population of the Southern Kenai Peninsula is primarily Caucasian. MAPP of the SKP has not sought incorporation as a separate entity, with the local hospital serving as fiscal agent for the collaboration, and contracting out the position of MAPP Coordinator.

### **Research Process and Methods**

A research log was kept to track processes, challenges and solutions as the research was conducted. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and oversight was obtained following procedures outlined by the University of Alaska Fairbanks IRB.

### **Literature Review**

A literature review was conducted related to the topics of community-based participatory research (CBPR), community development strategies that facilitate effective collaboration, and the use of indigenous knowledge systems in the development of successful collaboration. As

part of this literature review, key concepts, models and frameworks were examined and integrated into the design and goals of this study.

### **Permission**

Before beginning this project, permission was sought from the two communities identified to participate in the research. This was done by contacting the Network Director for the POW Health Network and the Coordinator of MAPP of the SKP. The proposed project was explained, including the goals of the project, what would be expected from each group, how each group would contribute to the research, and how they would benefit from participating in the research, including what they would receive in return for their participation. Potential barriers were also discussed with the researcher at this time so they could be taken into consideration in the study design. For example, MAPP of the SKP had recently completed an evaluation process which included key informant interviews and analysis of group operations and achievements. It was therefore important that a certain period of time be allowed between this evaluation and the research presented here to prevent a feeling of “over-evaluation” by Steering Committee members. At this time, coordinators were also asked whether there were specific areas they felt would be most interesting to examine. With permission from the leader of each collaborative effort, a written summary of the research was sent via email by the researcher to members of each Steering Committee, including a description of the project, expectations, benefits of participation, a timeline for the project, and contact information for questions or concerns.

### **Initial Survey**

A survey was developed for dissemination to all present Steering Committee members of each collaboration, as well as to the Network Director or Coordinator, with the goal to assess ten elements of the collaboration. These ten elements are 1) greatest successes of the collaboration,

2) factors contributing to success, 3) benefits of the collaboration to the community, 4) benefits of the collaboration to member organizations, 5) benefits of participation to members, 6) challenges of the collaboration, 7) factors contributing to challenges, 8) opportunities for the collaboration, 9) areas for development, and 10) factors affecting partner readiness to collaborate. A colleague of the researcher who is familiar with the format of collaboration being studied was asked to test-pilot the survey prior to distribution, to ensure the meaning of each question was as intended.

The survey was administered using Survey Monkey, an on-line survey tool. Consent was built into the survey as an initial question that was required to be completed by survey respondents before proceeding to the survey itself. The leader of each collaboration (POW Health Network Director and MAPP of the SKP Coordinator) was contacted to determine the most appropriate method for disseminating this survey (i.e., by the researcher or by the leader of the collaboration). Responses were solicited from a series of requests: an initial email requesting survey completion by the researcher, a follow-up email from the researcher, follow-up by the POW Health Network Director/MAPP of the SKP Coordinator, and finally, personalized emails from the researcher to each individual Steering Committee member. Of fourteen Steering Committee members and the Network Director for the Prince of Wales Health Network, nine total responses were received (with one more Steering Committee member indicating they were so new to the group that they did not feel they could answer the questions). Of twelve MAPP of the SKP Steering Committee members and the MAPP Coordinator, eight total responses were received. Upon further communication with the POW Health Network Director and MAPP of the SKP Coordinator, it was determined that these numbers were approximately equivalent to the



number of members that participate routinely in meetings and activities. Because this also represented a majority for each group, the sample sizes were judged to be adequate.

### **Query of Leaders**

To better facilitate the analysis and interpretation of data provided in the surveys, the POW Health Network Director and MAPP Coordinator were queried about operations of the collaboration. Questions included Steering Committee member length of participation in the effort and meeting attendance, frequency and length of regular meetings, how meetings are facilitated, existence of sub-committees, operating guidelines such as bylaws or defined roles and responsibilities, how decisions are made including quorum requirements, funding sources, and processes for communication.

### **Analysis of Survey Results**

Survey results for each community were then analyzed separately. Open-ended questions were coded and categorized into themes by hand, while closed-ended questions were tabulated and/or scored using Excel. Themes relevant to each open-ended question were selected based on common elements of collaboration identified through professional experience and a literature review. Tables were then developed displaying themes and response rates for open-ended questions, as well as displaying response rates and scores for closed-ended questions.

### **Presentation of Results to Communities**

A formal evaluation report was developed for each community describing that community's results from the survey. The report contained an introduction with an overview of the research project, a description of how to use and interpret the report, and survey methodology. Survey findings were presented using the following five categories: successes and benefits of the collaboration; challenges; future of the collaboration; tools, resources and areas

for development; and partner readiness to collaborate. Each question from the survey was included under one of these five categories.

For each question, the question that was asked was presented, as well as an explanation of why the question was asked and how results could be utilized to further support and build collaborative efforts. For open-ended questions, in addition to the analysis of themes, the text of individual responses was also included. These responses were provided verbatim to preserve the integrity of the response, except in cases where confidentiality of the survey respondent would be threatened. In these cases the response was summarized in a way to protect the confidentiality of the respondent.

Both the POW Health Network Director and MAPP of SKP Coordinator were then consulted regarding the best method to distribute the report. In both cases, it was agreed that the report would be sent to the Director/Coordinator for them to distribute to their respective Steering Committees. A written paragraph describing the report was provided by the researcher to disseminate along with the report.

### **Key Informant Interviews**

Following presentation of the reports to respective collaborations, key informant interviews were conducted with select Steering Committee members from each collaboration to delve more deeply into themes identified in the analysis of survey results. For reasons of historical context, the three longest-standing Steering Committee members from each collaboration were identified in consultation with the POW Health Network Director and the MAPP of the SKP Coordinator as key informants, and with permission, were contacted by the researcher to invite them to participate in a follow-up interview. While two Steering Committee members responded immediately, follow-up was required with the other four. Two more

Steering Committee members responded immediately to a second request, one did not respond at all to two emails followed by a phone call, and one responded after two emails followed by a phone call, but that member's time was extremely limited and scheduling was difficult enough that after a one month period efforts were dropped. A total of four of the six invited Steering Committee members participated in interviews. Three of these were MAPP of the SKP Steering Committee members, and one was a POW Health Network Steering Committee member. The difference in response rate may be related to the fact that the survey analysis for MAPP of the SKP was provided to the group in the context of a previously planned strategic planning session with an outside consultant, thus providing an opportunity for Steering Committee members to review the results together in a skillfully facilitated group session, immediately applying these results to their planning efforts.

Key informant interviews lasted approximately one-and-a-quarter hours, and all interviewees had a great deal of knowledge to share about collaboration, challenges presented by collaboration, and lessons learned. All key informants were asked a set of pre-determined questions based on a comparative analysis of survey results, as well as asked to share any final "words of wisdom" at the end of the interview. Interviews were audio recorded to help the researcher with notetaking, with recorded verbal permission obtained from each key informant prior to recording the interview itself. Interview notes and recordings were reviewed for common themes, as well as for individual thoughts on approaches to collaboration that were determined by the researcher to be beneficial to others.

## **Results**

Several themes emerged over the course of the research surrounding benefits of collaboration, challenges to collaboration, preparation for change, the concepts of readiness and

timing, demonstration of value in collaboration, the role of the director or coordinator, the impacts of funding needs and funding sources, and a correlation between goals of the collaboration supporting individual organizational goals and meeting attendance. These themes are summarized in Table 1.

<b>Table 1: Research Themes</b>
• Benefits from Collaboration
• Challenges to Collaboration
• Preparation for Change
• Readiness and Timing
• Demonstration of Value in Collaboration
• Role of the Director or Coordinator
• Impacts of Funding Needs and Funding Sources
• Correlation of Collaborative Goals with Individual Organizational Goals

Benefits of collaboration to the community were similar among the two groups, with the greatest benefits for both groups related to improved relationships and ability to communicate, improved awareness and knowledge of the services provided in the community, and a better ability to connect with each other and gain support for organizational goals. In one key informant interview, a Steering Committee member specifically expressed that the form of collaboration and communication offered had enhanced and changed the way in which she is able to do her job, and has helped her to do her job better. She also remarked that this is a benefit that often is not immediately apparent to new members (presumably due to the fact that working in the context of collaboration requires vision for the larger community goal rather than the organizational goal we are used to working in), with this systems approach to thinking new to many. This is a direct reflection of having a common agenda as suggested by the Collective



Impact Model (Kania & Kramer, 2013), with collaborative goals supporting each partner and mutually reinforcing each partner's activities.

Greatest personal benefits from participating in collaboration were also similar across both groups, with a heavy focus on the new relationships formed, the relationships strengthened, and the ability to more easily connect with leaders of other organizations serving the community through regular face to face meetings and contact. Other benefits to collaboration that were described include the infrastructure that the collaboration provides for seeking funding opportunities in the community, as well as the infrastructure provided to better facilitate community efforts in an organized fashion.

Factors identified as contributing to the success of the collaborating groups included teamwork, having a paid director/coordinator in place, diversity of the membership, community support and engagement, and regular communications and infrastructure. One key informant specifically commented that members need to be able to tie in their personal connection to the collaboration as much as possible in order to find value in the collaboration. This same key informant also commented on the importance of collaborating partners having opportunities to share what is happening within their own organizations and within their own lives at meetings to bring greater personal value to the collaboration.

Fewer similarities were seen across challenges the collaborations have faced, although based on researcher experience, challenges mentioned by both groups are challenges that are routinely faced by most collaborative groups. These challenges can fluctuate over time, disappearing and reappearing depending on current context and circumstances. Challenges cited included financial sustainability; clarifying infrastructure, roles and responsibilities; managing transition and change including transitions in leadership, membership turnover and growth, and

<b>Table 2: Benefits and Success Factors of Collaboration</b>	
<b>Benefits of Collaboration</b>	<b>Factors Contributing to Success</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved relationships and ability to communicate</li> <li>• New relationships</li> <li>• Ability to connect with leadership of other organizations</li> <li>• Better ability to gain support for organizational goals</li> <li>• Improved awareness and knowledge of services provided in the community</li> <li>• Infrastructure in place to support applications for collaborative funding opportunities</li> <li>• Infrastructure in place to support and facilitate community-wide efforts (systems approach)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teamwork</li> <li>• Paid director or coordinator</li> <li>• Diversity of membership</li> <li>• Community support and engagement</li> <li>• Regular communication</li> <li>• Infrastructure</li> </ul>

maturation of the coalition; and competing agendas, including managing individual versus group agendas. Two key informants indicated that having an expectation of change as a stated component of the collaborative effort, and becoming comfortable with the idea of change, was critical to the long-term success of the effort and managing transitions in goals, membership and leadership.

One similarity that was noted across groups when considering future challenges was that of securing funding to keep a paid director or coordinator in place. Dualistic comments from both groups indicated that ideally, if all partners were fully engaged and committed to the collaboration, there would not be a need for a paid coordinator. However, responses also commented on the importance of having a paid coordinator in place to take on the administrative and facilitative tasks of coordination and carrying out group goals.

When asked what their personal challenges were to collaboration, the majority of survey respondents from both groups indicated that time was their largest barrier to participation. However, one key informant commented that they had observed fewer people complaining about the time commitment when they felt that the collaboration was benefitting them or their organizations. One key informant also commented on the concept of financial sustainability, stating that there is a fine line and balance in focusing on financial sustainability, and if discussion becomes too resource-focused, people begin to lose their emotional connection to the collaboration and move into a place of scarcity, fear, or a sense of needing to hold on or find security – rather than focusing on abundance.

The surveys queried respondents about resources that have been useful to their groups, as well as areas seen as important to the long-term development of the collaboration. Significant similarities were seen across both groups on both these questions. In both groups, the greatest resource utilized has been the help of consultants to facilitate strategic planning and to support the director or coordinator in carrying out their duties effectively. Survey participants were also provided with a list of potential areas for development, and asked to rate how important they felt each area was to the long-term success of the group, rating each as “not important,” “a little important,” “moderately important,” or “very important”. Both groups gave the highest average scores (indicating most important) to the three areas of communication between members, organizational buy-in and support, and funding.

The concept of readiness and the value in measuring indicators of partner readiness to collaborate (Andrews et al., 2010) was a key finding of the research. Participants were presented with a list of twelve indicators of partner readiness to collaborate, representing three dimensions of partner readiness to collaborate. These are goodness of fit, capacity, and operations. By

asking respondents to rank each indicator by indicating whether they strongly disagreed, disagreed, were neutral, agreed, or strongly agreed with statements reflective of each indicator, scores were developed for each indicator and results were charted to illustrate strongest areas of partner readiness to collaborate, and other areas of partner readiness to collaborate that may require some improvement. Testing this model revealed it as a useful tool for collaborations to measure their own operations and at the same time demonstrate value in collaboration, something that is typically difficult to measure, yet important in order for partners to justify their time spent in meetings and focusing on collaboration outside of their own organizations. One key informant commented in depth about the idea of readiness, and that transitions and growth for the group have been successful as a result of the large amount of time spent building readiness beforehand.

In a separate question, survey participants were asked whether they felt that the goals of the collaboration support the goals of their own organization. Responses were quite different between the two groups here. In one group, all but one survey respondent indicated “yes, definitely” when asked whether the goals of the collaboration support the goals of their own organization. In the other group, only half of respondents did. The group that overwhelmingly felt that the goals of the collaboration supported the goals of their individual organizations also had much better meeting attendance, with 88% of their Steering Committee members reportedly attending either more than half or nearly all meetings, 7% attending some meetings but less than half the time, and 7% attending meetings never or almost never. Only half of the Steering Committee members of the other collaboration stated that they thought the goals of the collaboration supported the goals of their own organization, and this collaboration had much poorer meeting attendance, with only 66% of Steering Committee members attending meetings



more than half the time or almost always, and the other 33% reportedly attending meetings never or almost never. Though sample size is small with only two collaborations studied, this is perhaps demonstrative that participants must find value and benefit in the collaboration in order to participate, with active participation being a fundamental component of collaboration.

Several other key aspects to successful collaboration arose in key informant interviews. One key informant interviewed discussed the importance of not just defining value for the collaborative partnership, but also defining what values are important in leadership and that clarity in what is valued in a leader for the partnership supports successful transitions in the collaboration.

One key informant discussed the importance of having different leaders in the community to guide the various initiatives being taken on by the group, also referencing that having funding available to contract for these leadership activities was key in effectively transitioning to a shared leadership model. This same key informant also commented on the amount of time that it took the group to come to a point where they were ready to transfer responsibility for leading efforts, and the importance of a separate task force to guide the leadership of each of these efforts as well.

Regarding leadership, one key informant referenced that the director or coordinator plays an important role as “the face” of the collaboration, and the importance of the community recognizing this person as a leader due to the large public relations role that is played by this person. Finally, one key informant discussed leadership transitions in detail, suggesting the importance of having not just a job description in hiring staff, but of collectively agreeing as a group on what educational background a leader should have. This key informant also commented on the challenge of more versus less leadership, commenting that giving more

leadership responsibility to Steering Committee members keeps them more engaged in the process of collaboration, and that when Steering Committee members have fewer leadership responsibilities they become less engaged. However, this comment presents a conflict with the majority of survey respondents commenting on the challenge of time commitment, and the value of a network director or coordinator to facilitate and manage efforts.

One key informant commented that in general there are problems with over-assessment in our communities, and that it is equally important to take action at the community level.

Two key informants discussed change in depth, with one remarking that coming to peace with the idea of change, “going with the flow,” and not being afraid to adapt was important to continued enjoyment of participation in the collaboration; and another commenting that it is important for collaborating partners to view change not as losing something, but as gaining something instead. One key informant discussed the process for conflict resolution, stating that there is an effective process in place to resolve conflict, but what has been more difficult for members is not resolving the conflict itself, but rather “activating the process for solving conflict.” This may be indicative of differences in approach to communication and conflict resolution, as well as differences in how conflict itself is defined among members of the group.

### **Challenges and Lessons Learned**

The primary challenges encountered during the course of the research included survey participation rates of Steering Committee members, participation of Steering Committee members in key informant interviews, and capturing the attention of Steering Committee members when presented with the report summarizing survey results. However, neither of these challenges was insurmountable, and lessons were learned to support effective engagement in the future.

The value of involving the Network Director or Coordinator in introducing the research project to the community, soliciting responses from members, disseminating research findings, utilizing the results of the research findings, and gaining participation in informant interviews cannot be understated. The leader understands the nuances of the Steering Committee relationships, the operations of the collaboration, and can provide support to the researcher in understanding how best to approach the project, what the immediate needs of the group are, any potential barriers, and in encouraging members to participate. The POW Health Network Director and MAPP of SKP Coordinator were essential in overcoming all three of the challenges presented. The Director and Coordinator played a role of liaison, introducing the research study to the group, helping to recruit participants in the survey, and identifying Steering Committee members for key informant interviews. The Director and Coordinator also played important roles in identifying potential barriers to participation and identifying best approaches to engage Steering Committee members in the project.

In both cases, communicating benefit to be gained by participating in the research was key. If Steering Committee members understand how their participation in the research will benefit their collaborative group as well as the community, they will be more likely to prioritize time out of their busy schedules to participate.

How to engage Steering Committee members in reviewing and integrating the survey results into their collaborative work was also a challenge. Quite serendipitously, one collaborative group had a pre-planned strategic planning session with an outside consultant to focus on operational issues of the group, and the report was provided the week prior to this strategic planning session for dissemination and discussion of the report. Because of the convenient timing, illustrative components of the assessment were used to aid in strategic

planning efforts. To the best knowledge of the researcher, the other group did not have a similar opportunity to immediately put the report to use, and although the leader of the group noted that the report contained a great deal of valuable information, she also noted that it was difficult to convince Steering Committee members to read it. One key informant suggested including an Executive Summary in the report to better engage Steering Committee members in reviewing the report. This evidence supports an approach to evaluation where it is best done not just for the sake of evaluation, but rather to support and facilitate specific planning and development efforts that are directly and immediately applicable and relevant to the collaborative group.

The value of utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data in the course of research was also highlighted. In some cases, quantitative and qualitative data did not align completely, suggesting that numbers often do not tell the complete story, and emphasizing the importance of context. Respondents all bring a different set of experiences to the effort. They may interpret questions and response options slightly differently, and the opportunity for providing qualitative information helps to interpret the quantitative responses more accurately. In addition, utilizing a combination of surveys and key informant interviews was useful in the research. While surveys garnered more participants, interviews examined themes and concepts on a much deeper and more contextual level. During the course of conducting key informant interviews, many aspects of collaboration rose to the surface that did not come out in the surveys, and interviews also provided additional context to many of the challenges and successes highlighted by both groups in their surveys. While past professional experience with the researcher likely impacted the willingness of key informants to participate in interviews, and may have impacted the amount of detail shared, it appeared that key informants enjoyed the opportunity to talk about their

successes, how challenges have been resolved and to share what they felt to be critical elements to successful collaboration.

A final challenge of this research project, though essentially unavoidable in the context of this project, is that sample sizes are low. With two collaborative efforts and fewer than ten respondents from each group, results should be interpreted cautiously. At a future date surveying additional and similar collaborative efforts, as well as conducting additional key informant interviews may be beneficial to the project.

An unanticipated benefit of the research project, and an important key finding, was the ability to test the partner readiness to collaborate model (Andrews et al., 2010), which led to the development of a tool that can be used to measure collaborative growth and potential areas for development.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This research study evaluated two collaborative efforts in rural Alaska focused on improving community health to better understand those factors that contribute to effective and meaningful collaboration to improve community health. While sample sizes are small, themes emerged that may be utilized in effectively facilitating collaborative efforts. Many of these themes revolve around the creation of value and benefit in collaboration for those directly participating in the collaboration, as well as the organizations they represent. Other important themes were an ability to embrace change and view it through a positive lens, and the extreme value that the relationships formed and built through collaboration provide. Success may be defined differently by each collaborative effort depending on the goals of the collaboration and who the partners in the collaboration are. However, the themes identified through this research study can be applied to any collaborative effort to work towards facilitation of efforts that are



both meaningful and effective as defined by that community and that group of partners. Studying additional collaborative efforts at a future date could augment the research and provide further valuable information to support groups wishing to collaborate to improve community health.

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